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MYSTICS ALL

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BY

ENID M. DINNIS

Author of "God's Fairy Tales" "Once upon Eternity," "Mr. Coleman Gent," etc.

SECOND IMPRESSION

1922

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Dedication

The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing."

Eyes that seeing cannot fill—
Eyes that seek for vision still
In a world where few men fare,
Peering through the mystic's grille:

Ears a-strain for more than sound—
Ears that long-sought things had found
Trespassing 'twixt Here and There
In the Seer's Tom Tiddler's Ground:

Hearts that seek a sturdier sooth
Than the tales of love-lorn youth,
Viewing life's fantastic span
From the angel's side of truth.

Take these "mystic" tales from me—
Things that happened, it might be,
In the wondrous heart of man
Once upon eternity.

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Several of the stories included in this volume have appeared in the "Irish Rosary," and one in the "Month." They are reprinted by kind permission of the respective Editors.

MYSTICS ALL

CRAZY SAMMY; OR, THE CLOCK THAT TOLD ETERNITY

THE GUEST HOUSE,
LOUVAIN COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,
4th August, 192—.

I.

MY DEAR ——,

You have set me no less than three questions to answer in your last letter. You ask (1) Have I ever experienced any phenomena as the result of prayer and its efficacy? (2) Were not all the saints slightly insane? (3) Have the angels a sense of humour, and if so, what kind of jokes do they appreciate?

Now, I propose to answer all three questions at once by perpetrating a memoir of an old schoolmate of mine whom we used to call "Crazy Sammy" on account of his immunity from the ordinariness of other children. It will incidentally contain an answer to all your three questions, and I have always felt that Sammy ought to be written up, so you have provided me with a culminating excuse for that outrage on the departed—a biographical

sketch. Remember, please, that this will be for private perusal, supposing that you, yourself, succeed in wading through the story of Crazy Sammy, offered in a spirit of debate, in answer to a three-fold thesis.

Sammy was certainly the most interesting and engaging human being that I have ever come across, and beyond all question the most amusing. Foremost among his various characteristics—he was a genius for one thing—was his irrepressibility in dealing with the Unseen. I knew him from a tiny child—he was my first playmate—and from the first I associated him with novenas. Sammy made cadging onslaughts on the denizens of heaven at the age when the normal infant applies himself to amenable uncles and aunts. He had a sturdy and logical faith in Providence, and to Providence he went for everything he fancied, from a Christmas-tree to a catapult. Now, the curious thing about Sammy's praying propensity was that it never produced results. I can never once remember him pulling off anything through a novena. This was the phenomenon connected with Crazy Sammy, coupled with the fact that I never knew him to be discouraged. He accepted the result with the cheeriest optimism, and displayed considerable ingenuity in explaining the behaviour of the saint who had apparently failed him. I remember once, when Sammy was a very small boy, he became

possessed of a cricket-ball. With his usual energy he immediately set about making a novena to obtain an accessory bat. The novena was made to St Aloysius, who, we learned from our schoolmaster (a sensible Jesuit, anxious to protect the Saint from his chroniclers' calumnies), had been much addicted to sports as a boy, and had even run them concurrently with his prayers and ecstasies. Whether the schoolmaster was wrong and the pious chroniclers right, I do not know, but (on the face of it) St Aloysius disapproved of Sammy's request, and showed it rather markedly, for not only was the bat not forthcoming, but on the ninth day of the novena Sammy's playmates borrowed the ball (every body borrowed Sammy's things), and knocked it irreparably out of bounds. At first poor Sammy appeared to be undone, but he pulled himself together sturdily. St Aloysius, he declared, had not given him a bat, true, but he had taken away his ball so that he shouldn't want a bat, and that was the same thing. A philosopher might have told him that it was even better. Thomas-à-Kempis would have been delighted with the answer, but Sammy's comrades only said "Rats!" or something in the prevailing vernacular to that effect, and Sammy, being perhaps less saintly than his patron (I say *perhaps*, for I have a great regard myself for St Aloysius), gave the worst offender "what for" with his fists, and began a novena the very next

week to get a fine day for his picnic. So far as I remember, it rained.

There was another repartee of Sammy's that I remember which would have pleased the theologians. We had a companion called Dicky (his people lived next door to Sammy's), of whom Sammy was very anxious to make a Catholic. Dicky was a hardened pagan, but Sammy was convinced that if we could but get him into church during Benediction, the sight of the Blessed Sacrament must instantly convert him to the truth. I had my doubts, I am ashamed to say, but Sammy had none, albeit that he had taken not a few Protestant companions to church in his time. Dicky took some persuading—he had congenital suspicions of Romanism—but at length Sammy's vigorous invocations succeeded so far that one day Dicky consented to accompany us to Exposition. We knelt at the far end of the church, and Sammy prayed his best and hardest, while Dicky stared in wonder at the blaze of candles and the strange central object. At last, suddenly, and rather to our alarm, Dicky spoke up. I can hear his shrill child's treble breaking the dead silence. "But the clock's got no hands!" he said.

I was totally without an answer. I didn't even realise at first what he meant by the "clock," but Sammy knew and was ready, if a little disconcerted by the disappointing nature of the observation.

"It doesn't need hands," he retorted, in a didactic undertone. "It isn't telling time, it's telling eternity."

We neither of us forgot that answer.

Dicky's scepticism ought to have proved a damper to Sammy's ardour. They were great friends, and Dicky, in spite of his freethinking parentage, was initiated into the meaning of novenas and the intercessory offices of the saints, the friends of God. They proved rather a stumbling block to him, I am afraid, owing to the absence of sensational results. Dicky pursued a process of destructive criticism as he and Sammy grew into their 'teens, and out of them. "No, old man," he said to Sammy, "that won't do about prayer only being answered when it is good for you to receive the thing you ask for. That's 'heads I win, tails you lose.'" As for the doctrine that prayer is good in itself, apart from results, a pagan like Dicky could not be expected to accept that. But even Dicky, in the zenith of his intelligent 'teens, couldn't find an answer to the phenomenon of Sammy's confidence in the Providence that so rarely gave him what he asked for. He even felt impelled to consider the possibility that Crazy Sammy was receiving his favours on the spiritual plane, for certainly a more winning personality than Sammy's could not be imagined. He got as far as creating in Dicky a strong and sincere desire to believe the things

that Sammy believed, but there Dicky's conversion seemed to stop. Sammy had scores of friends, for, as I have said, he was the most lovable person imaginable; many besides Dicky must have waxed curious as to the secret. Many of these were either Anglicans or Agnostics, but it seemed to be part of his peculiar fortune that he never succeeded in bringing these actually into the Church, though, no doubt, he offered perpetual novenas to Blessed Edmund Campion or St Francis Xavier, as the case might be, for their conversion. True, he never argued religion, but after years of friendship with Sammy, who always treated sympathetic outsiders exactly as though they were of the fold—he was never acrimonious—their conversion would be brought about in some way with which Sammy had no apparent connection—by the brilliance of Father This, or the writings of Monsignor That, it might be.

When Crazy Sammy was about twenty he fell in love. Naturally, he made a novena to gain heavenly assistance before venturing to put the fateful question to the lady of his devotion. He chose St Philomena on this occasion. She possessed a shrine in our parish church, surmounted by a rather nice-looking statue. He promised the saint a floral offering for her altar if his prayer were granted, and it really did seem that this time Sammy was going to succeed, for the young lady had the good taste to accept him. The poor fellow was

beside himself with joy—and astonishment. He was the humblest soul alive. He hastened to St Philomena's altar with his arms loaded with floral tributes, and on the way thither he met his lady-love. She naturally thought the flowers were meant for herself, and when she learned their destination she became exceedingly angry with Sammy, who had scruples which prevented him from diverting his offering. The upshot of it was that the lady rescinded her acceptance of Sammy's hand, and sent him about his business. So St Philomena got her flowers on false pretences, which was very "unethical" of her, Dick said. It did seem that the saints poked fun at poor Sammy. I remembered St Aloysius and the cricket-ball.

Poor Sammy was broken-hearted. It was no laughing matter. I really thought that the miserable hussy had done for poor old Sammy as a woman can, even with a boy's calf love, but to my relief he bulged out again, to use Dick's expression. "You see, old man," he said to me one night, as he sat staring with big, mournful eyes into the fire, "after all, if she was as jealous as that of a saint, she would have been very difficult to manage if one ever did the civil thing to ordinary ladies."

We were fain to confess that St Philomena, although she had displayed a certain whimsical humour in getting the flowers, had really gained for Sammy the thing that was for his greatest

happiness. Even Dick admitted it, and went to the length of presenting St Philomena with a particularly large votive candle.

II.

I mentioned incidentally at the beginning of this that Sammy was a genius. He possessed a passion for architecture, and an extraordinary gift for interpreting the stone poems of the mediæval builders. He travelled all over the Continent after he left college, studying the various cathedrals. I accompanied him on one of these occasions, and the companionship of Crazy Sammy was an unmitigated joy. His imagination ran riot among the glories of the Gothic churches of Northern France and Belgium. Mystical, fantastic, yet withal extraordinarily convincing, he found a hidden meaning behind everything that met the eye. He had an allegory for every arch, and read parables into porticos. Beauty to him was inevitably a sacrament of the Unseen. Thus, in addition to his technical and archæological knowledge, Sammy was a delightful guide, possessed of unique and exclusive information. His ambition was to make a book, which he proposed to entitle "Stones a-dreaming," in which he could embody the vagrant fancies that overtook him, and reinterpret the message of the old monkish masons, as well as dilate on the wonders patent to the casual observer.

He travelled assiduously, and made multitudinous notes, being fortunately independent of his profession —he had become an architect—for a living. In time he collected the material for a standard work, in which the great Cathedral of X, with its world famed clock—the clock that sends out Father Time, a resplendent figure, to strike the hour—would have several chapters to itself. I visited X with Sammy, and shall never forget his rapture over the ancient library and its contents, and his delight at getting a view of the famous X monstrance, which is older than any written record of the custom of lifting up the Blessed Sacrament for worship, and, therefore, of theological as well as archæological value. Of all the Gothic churches, I think Sammy loved X Cathedral the best.

When he had collected all the material for his monumental undertaking (and, of course, made a novena!) Sammy retired to his lodgings and settled down to write "Stones a-dreaming." Then there came a characteristic digression. Sammy possessed an acquaintance, a man considerably older than himself, who had lapsed into Agnosticism from Catholicism. He was a curious fellow, warm-hearted and very self-willed. When he quarrelled with the Christian creed Humanity became his religion, and he devoted himself to Social Reform, living a life of really admirable self-sacrifice among the poor. That he still possessed hankerings after the Church

of his boyhood, and its sacraments, was clear; and this became clearer still when a fatal malady seized hold of him and the specialist pronounced his death-warrant. G—— quarrelled desperately with most of his Catholic friends, but he rather liked Sammy. I think it was because the latter never seemed aware of his lapse, but talked to him exactly as though he were a practising Catholic instead of an outsider with a working knowledge of the truth which made his "good faith" a doubtful question. When he received his fiat he sent for Sammy and invited him to come and "talk business." Sammy prayed frantically that the business might be that of the soul, and made a novena to that purpose to a new and very efficacious saint whose portrait shows a rather suspicious twinkle in the eye. He packed his bag for the week-end and went off to the sick man in his country place in Hampshire. The business proved to be pure business. G—— wished to know if Sammy would be willing to undertake the writing of the life of a certain eminent Social Reformer, lately deceased, a man of facts and statistics and revolutionary ideas, for which he had collected the material. Now, Sammy had no kind of turn for Social Reform. He possessed no notion how the poor were housed, nor did he sit on a single committee for their educational betterment. He had rather fastidious tastes, too, had Sammy, which made him not too anxious for

close contact with the details of overcrowding, etc. I doubt if the author of "Stones a-dreaming" attached any definite meaning to the blessed word economics, but he realised at once that the writing of this book under G——'s supervision would keep him in touch with the man who was approaching his end in conscious defiance of what one part of him, at any rate, knew to be the truth. He thanked the saint of the novena for this obvious answer, and undertook the "Life" at what he admitted afterwards was a sporting risk. G—— had still some months of life before him. He was anxious to see the work on its way, so it was arranged that Sammy should take up his residence with him, and apply himself to the writing of G——'s book. Sammy returned to his town diggings, packed away "Stones a-dreaming," collected his wardrobe, and betook himself back to G—— for an indefinite period.

There he sat, by G——'s bedside, smiling serenely, and discussing the moribund Poor-Law system, and hoping that the dying man would one day out with the thing that was ever lurking at the back of his mind, and make his peace with the Church of his baptism. He knew that any attempt to hasten matters would procure his banishment, so he just waited, and smiled, and prayed, and never so much as doubted that the other would one day tell him to fetch a priest and end the quarrel with his Creator.

It went on for months—the compiling of matters of fact relating to the deceased philanthropist, the cheery discussion of trivialities, the waiting, and the praying. I don't believe a man ever prayed as Sammy prayed during those months. I saw him once during the time, and, I declare, he looked as ill and haggard as the sick man himself. I suppose he made as many novenas, as there were nine-days spells in that long-drawn agony! With the sick man himself he was always cheerful and confident—the very embodiment of the faith that the other had subjected to a "higher criticism."

At the end of five months the book was well on its way, the last stage of the illness had been entered upon, and the rebel had received a "Kikuyu" sacrament from the local Protestant parson, who, being a true Christian, in his own sense of the term, exacted neither profession nor confession from the recipient of the mystery of which he was steward. The rebel had scored a last sorry victory over Dogma. He had received the sacrament of the "Church" on his own terms. He died three days later, and the kind little Kikuyu-minded parson buried him, and Sammy returned home with the half-completed book and a copy of the evangelical Church paper, which contained the deceased rebel's obituary notice, with an account of his conversion and devout reception of the Lord's Supper.

For about a month I saw little of Sammy. He

was in rather a terrible state of mind—he knew it himself, and avoided his friends purposely. At the end of that time he brightened up suddenly in a most amazing way. I went in one evening to see him, rather dreading it, I must confess. There was something terrible about Sammy nowadays that one was conscious of when one was near him. To my astonishment I found him as gay as a sandboy. He welcomed me with more than his old cheeriness. "Put on your pipe," he said, "I've got something to tell you." He pushed me into a cosy arm-chair, and proceeded to give me his news. He was thinking of joining a religious community called the Little Brothers of St Anthony. It was a Franciscan Tertiary movement, and the object was to establish a kind of religious life in the slums—to prove, in fact, that the spiritual could be fostered amongst the poorest and most degrading surroundings. The Little Brothers would have a novitiate where they would practise manual labour, and learn certain facts as to how the working-man lives, so as to be in real fellowship with their neighbours in the small settlements to which they would be moved when professed. Their life would be absolutely that of the working classes plus religion—" a hark back to Nazareth," Sammy called it.

It was a fine ideal enough, but I sat and gasped. What an amazing choice for a man of Crazy Sammy's type!—a dreamer, with rather fastidious tastes. I

had sometimes thought that he might become a Benedictine, owing to his studious habits, but this announcement fairly staggered me.

"Where on earth," I said, "did you get hold of the idea?"

"Nowhere on earth," was the prompt reply. "The fact is, I've wanted to do something definite with my life for years, but I wasn't certain what it ought to be, so I went to an expert and told him all about myself. I felt pretty sure he'd say Benedictines, but he didn't; he was certain it was these 'Brown Brothers' I was meant for, and I've never known him to make a mistake. I had promised myself that I would follow his advice as *vox Dei*, so—there it is!"

The craziness of Sammy was staggering!

"And how about your writing?" I asked. "You won't get any opportunity of writing in that existence."

"Of course, I shall have to finish the 'Life' before I go," he answered. "That's a clear duty."

"And how about 'Stones a-dreaming?'" I queried.

"Oh," he replied, serenely, "I expect I shall find time to finish it there by degrees."

"He be rightly called 'Crazy Sammy,'" Dick declaimed, shaking his head, sorrowfully, when he heard the news. "It's rank suicide! Sammy is as mad as many hatters!" Dick had an enormous affection for Sammy. He had watched the G——

drama with a keen interest as to the upshot that made me realise that the rebel's defection had had a double issue. Dicky's congenital scepticism had certainly not abated.

Sammy stuck to the " Life " for the next three months, and talked of nothing else. He was incapable of doing anything without whole-heartedness and enthusiasm, and his task had become really congenial. Dick and I began to hope that it had successfully killed the preposterous Brown Brother idea, but Sammy emerged from the task, bursting with satisfaction over the result of his work, and immensely excited as to its prospects, but as quietly convinced as ever as to his religious vocation. He took the book to a leading publisher. I had seen the MS., and I must say it was a charming production. Sammy had been able to work in some of his own ideas, and to modify the doctrines of the social reformer when desirable. It would certainly prove a useful work from the Catholic point of view.

I think Sammy must have considered the " Life " worth praying for, for he met with his typical "luck." The leading publisher praised the book up to the skies, and expressed his astonishment that its author should not be aware that a life of the same individual, written by the foremost living writer of Biography, was already in the press. Sammy's book, admirable as it was, would not have the ghost of a chance.

I was astounded at the cheery, matter-of-fact

way in which Sammy imparted the information to me. "You see," he said, sucking his pipe comfortably as we sat over the fire in his rooms, "it doesn't really matter. I did my part and carried out the bargain—it wouldn't have been playing the game to chuck the book when G—— died—and I did it properly, it seems, so *that*'s all right. The point of the book was that it served its purpose and kept me in touch with him."

"But what if it did?" I inquired bluntly. "Nothing came of your keeping in touch with G——." It was rather a brutal thing to say, and I felt it directly I had spoken, remembering the Sammy of the month succeeding G——'s death, but my companion simply surveyed me with his most seraphic smile.

"G—— was all right," he said, "he got faith in the end." He put his pipe down and leant over the fire, gazing into the glowing coals. I can see him now, the light playing on his face, and the expression on it that made Crazy Sammy beloved among men.

"No!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean it! However did you come to know? I thought G—— was unconscious for hours before he died?"

"I knew," Sammy answered, slowly, "about a month after." He was speaking in a very low tone, and I listened with all my ears, intensely interested, in fact, bursting with curiosity. "For about a month I felt awful about him. I can't explain

it—I'm not a bigot—but I couldn't be happy about G——. I knew it was something that I had to stick, so I just stuck it, and kept away from you fellows." Sammy made a long, eloquent pause, and I noticed the deep lines on either side of the mouth that was certainly firmer than a year ago.

"Then," he went on, "I suddenly got my marching orders, and, of course, I knew it was all right with G——. You see, it was like this," he explained; "I always felt that G—— was a much finer chap than I, so when I prayed for him to get faith, I always prayed for myself too, that I might get —well, works—that I might do a bit of *real* good in the world. It seemed to make it less patronising somehow. G—— was such a magnificent chap for a rotter like me to be helping. (Sammy looked thoroughly abashed, and hurried on with his story.) It came to me quite suddenly—this feeling that I would go into a religious Order and get my life licked into shape. I had always had a vague idea at the back of my mind about the Benedictines—their libraries attracted me—but this was just the difference between desire and will. It was the old thing about the 'buts' and 'ifs.' I think, on the whole, I desired it less than I had done many times before, but I *willed* now to do it, whatever happened, and not only that, but I knew I intended to go into the thing that demanded the utmost sacrifice if it were pointed out as the way. I had no reserves.

I hoped it might be a learned Order, but it proved to be this Brown Brother business—quite a new idea!"

"But, about G——," I reminded him. "Did he make a sign, then—an outward act of faith or contrition?"

Sammy looked at me with something approaching wonderment.

"No," he said, "but why should he? Can't you see, he *must* have got his when I got mine! Why, man alive, the good God isn't a cynic!"

I sat silent and fairly amazed. Cheated out of a sensational story, I was faced with this phenomenon of Crazy Sammy's irrepressibility. Flattened out more effectually than ever before in this appalling soul-drama, this futile wrestling with the powers of evil, he had "bulged out" again to an unprecedented extent. I wanted to laugh, and I also wanted to cry. I thought of a certain saint who called herself the Holy Child's spinning-top. If playthings have a part in the Divine economy, God had surely made an india-rubber ball of Crazy Sammy!

He came to me on the last night. He had got rid of all his possessions, for the Brothers of St Anthony may possess nothing, not a book nor a picture of their own, and sentimental links with the world. He brought me a pocket-book—he had no relatives with whom to deposit anything, or with whom he would have cared to do so—which he

asked me to take care of in case, as he put it, he "got the boot" out of the Order.

"I've chanced it with everything else," he said, "but I've kept these photos."

His voice was husky. I found it hard to let Sammy go that night.

The pocket-book was not wrapped up. Its owner had evidently made no secret from me of its contents. When he had gone I took the photographs out and looked at them. One was a likeness of the lady who had been so disastrously jealous of St Philomena, and the other was a remarkably characteristic portrait of G——.

III.

The Order that Sammy was about to enter had established a house in X, which in those days was the industrial Utopia of Europe. The Brothers were anxious to make a study of the social system obtaining there, so it fell out that the compiler of "Stones a-dreaming" found himself told off to the famous city, where the monastery of the Brothers of St. Anthony stood under the very shadow of the Cathedral. I was delighted, for Sammy's sake, when I heard the news, not that he would find much opportunity for dreaming in his new life, but the sight of the meditative towers would be a solace to his poetic soul.

For five or more years we heard nothing of

Sammy. He seemed to have gone completely out of our lives. Then one night I dreamt of him. In my dream I saw a monk who appeared to be having a game with a little boy. The former was building up a house of bricks with a remarkably high tower. When it reached a certain height, the child, with a delighted shout, swept his hand across the brow of the tower and destroyed the entire erection, whereupon the monk patiently started rebuilding. At first I took the monk to be St Anthony, who, no doubt, had games with his traditional Visitor, although modern chroniclers might not think it decorous to record it; but when he turned his head—he was laughing with the utmost good humour—it was Crazy Sammy. The dream was quite ordinary but sufficiently vivid to bring my friend back to my mind and produce a keen desire to see him again. The upshot of it was that I suggested to our old friend Dick that we should take a holiday on the Continent together and look up Sammy *en route*. Dick was delighted with the proposition, so off we went.

We made straight for X, and discovered Sammy in a rough brown habit, housed in a new yellow-brick convent, something like the out-buildings of a laundry. He looked as well and as merry as possible. He certainly appeared to have found his vocation. He had received ordination, and was now a priest. Many of the Brothers, however,

were laymen of the working-class. He was plainly disappointed to learn that Dick was still an "outsider." We made anxious inquiries about "Stones a-dreaming," and were rejoiced to hear that it was actually completed. Sammy had accomplished it in the recreation hours of three years! Dick immediately undertook to place it with a publisher for the author, if he wished, and his gratitude knew no bounds. It was good to see Sammy again!

"I'll pray you into the Church yet," he said cheerily, to Dick as we parted.

We determined to stop a few days at X. There were rumours of war abroad, and we hesitated about continuing our journey. In a few days there was no hesitation. War had been declared in Europe, and tourists were hastening back to England from all parts of the Continent. Dick and I were in no hurry to return. It was impossible to anticipate the events that happened. As it was, within a few days we found ourselves in a beleaguered city undergoing the horrors of bombardment. A few days more and the investing army had entered the city gates. And then there began the initial horrors of the great war. X was looted. Houses were set on fire, and citizens shot in cold blood. Dick and I were in the midst of it, and we were terribly anxious about Sammy. A number of priests had been shot, and it was no surprise to me when Dick came back to me one morning with the news that the

monastery of the Brothers of St Anthony was in flames. Dick was as pale as death. "All the Brothers were safe," he said. They had been made to come out and stand in the square while the monastery was deliberately set on fire. "Stones a-dreaming" had perished in the flames.

"It was Sammy's fault," Dick sighed; "he is as mad as ever. They gave him leave to go back to his cell and fetch his MS., and he was off like a rocket, poor chap. I went with him. We had to go right round to get to the back entrance, and just as we turned the corner some miserable sinner in the crowd was struck by a bit of falling timber, and began shouting for a priest to confess his sins to—he had plenty, I dare say. I could see the kind of cur he was by the way he shoved the women and children to escape from the falling stuff. I besought Sammy to get his MS. first, and then attend to the fellow, but it was no good. Sammy must needs go to him at once, and see to him, and when he had finished with him the roof had fallen in and there was no getting near the cells. If I had known the way I'd have gone alone," Dick said, with a groan. "'Stones a-dreaming' was worth fifty souls like that craven wretch's. I told Sammy so, and, credit me, all he said was: 'It was a mercy you hadn't taken the MS., for if I hadn't been running round to get it, that poor chap would have died without a priest—he hadn't been to con-

fession for years.' I assure you he meant what he said!"

That was a historic day for X—for the whole civilised world; for that same evening, when the conqueror had marched his forces out of the city, and the terrified citizens were venturing out into the streets once more, a great cry went suddenly forth, "The Cathedral! The Cathedral is on fire!"

Filled with horror, we dashed out of doors and followed the crowd to the Market-place. Sure enough, the unthinkable catastrophe had happened. X Cathedral, with its adjacent Library, unmatched in the whole of Europe, was a mass of flames. It has never been discovered whether the fire was an intentional diabolical contrivance, or whether it arose from an accidental cause, such as a bomb having fallen on the woodwork of the roof, and slowly done the deadly work which had culminated in a sudden burst of enveloping flame. The crowd stood gazing up at the smoking towers completely dazed. The Blessed Sacrament had been actually exposed in the Cathedral, in the famous monstrance, when the fire broke out with such intensity that the watchers had fled, horror-stricken by the loud explosion that accompanied the sudden conflagration.

No one dared venture near the burning building except on the south side, where the flames had not yet reached the transept, over the door leading into which the world-famed clock still stood intact.

Dick and I took up our position and stood, as in a dream, trying to realise the treasures that were being wiped out of existence. It was something more than the mind could grasp. The news was passed along that the great Library, with its priceless documents and manuscripts, was a raging furnace. Not one volume had been saved. A groan went up from the assembled citizens. The women wept outright, and the tears rolled down the men's cheeks as they watched their great church perishing before their eyes. Ever and anon there was a crash of falling masonry, and some of the women shrieked aloud, others keeping up a low moaning. The Cathedral, the great guardian of the city, was like something living—the world itself must come to an end with Nôtre Dame of X!

Suddenly a fresh murmur ran through the crowd, and a cry went up. 'Someone has gone inside! A monk! He has gone into the Cathedral—he is going to try and save the Blessed Sacrament!'

A brown-habited figure had, indeed, darted through the open south door, under the great clock. The cry went round, "He will be burnt alive!" All eyes were fixed on the door. Would the daring monk return? Then there was a huge groan. A a tongue of flame shot out of the window to the left, and a volume of smoke poured out of the door. A moment later a shrill child's voice cried out:

"But, see, the clock has no hands!"

Trivial things have a way of striking the mind at vital moments. The child's voice, the shrill sudden tone—albeit that it spoke in a different language—recalled another that had, years ago, in the little church at home, made that same comment —"but the clock has no hands!"

Involuntarily I glanced at Dick. Did he also remember the small pagan who had made a like observation years ago. Yes. He caught my eye and smiled. He had not forgotten the trivial little episode.

All eyes had turned to the clock. The flames had reached it at last. The huge hands had fallen, and the skeleton works stood displayed. That marvel of mediæval mechanism, the clock of X, with its giant figure of Father Time, which performed such amazing evolutions at the striking of the hour, was a mass of melting iron. I shall never forget the groan that went up from the crowd. the passing of the clock seemed to epitomise the cataclysm that they were witnessing. Their world of substance had been changed into a nightmare of shadow. Then there was a sudden, sharp cry, "Look! Look!"

Framed in the huge face of the clock there stood the figure of a man in a brown habit holding in both hands something that glittered in the glare of the surrounding flames. It was the famous monstrance, and the man who held it in his hands was Crazy Sammy!

He had mounted the clock-loft with his precious Burden, apparently seeking a means of escape. He still had his cowl on, flying back over his shoulders. He stood there, looking at the horror-ridden populace, with his wonderful smile, as serene as though he had been sitting in his den at St James's. Quick as lightning Dick sprang forward into the space before the door, and shouted up to the imprisoned man above:

"Throw down your cloak. We'll hold it while you jump!" The distance was not more than thirty feet.

The cloak had already become detached. "Throw it down!" Dick repeated.

An instinct of obedience, I take it, rather than one of self-preservation, made the other do as he was told. At any rate, he pushed the mantle with his foot—he was grasping the monstrance with both hands—and it fluttered slowly to the ground, enveloping Dick's head and shoulders as he stood below. A dozen men dashed forward and seized it in order to hold it out, blanket-fashion, but the intense heat was too much for them. Flames mingled with the smoke, and they were compelled to retreat. Sammy stood his ground, apparently unconscious of their efforts.

Then a weird thing happened. The striking apparatus of the clock made a last attempt to perform the task of six centuries. It struck one

stroke normally—then a harsh and buzzing note. Then there was a crash, and a mass of twisted metal which had been the imposing figure of Father Time toppled over and fell to the ground. The child's voice rose again, "The clock has no hands!"

The entire framework seemed to be subsiding, but Sammy remained where he was. He held the monstrance in his right hand and raised his left with a swift gesture. A hush fell on the buzzing crowd. In the tense silence his message fell on their ears. In slow, ringing tones it came:—

"Courage, my children. All this is nothing!" He swept his hand backward at the "slain stones" of the first Gothic church and the ashes of the unduplicated treasures in the library. His face was shining with its sweetest and happiest expression—"*Quidquid æternum non est nihil est*"—"That which is not eternal is nothing!"

Fresh flames burst out near him, and I looked away horror-stricken. "My God!" a man near me said, "the poor fellow's gone mad!—he's laughing!"

I looked back in frenzied fear. On Sammy's face, as he stood there, there was something that could only be described as mirth! Something had *amused* him! Was it the nothingness of the "nothing" in its comparison with the Eternal.

He raised the monstrance above his head—he had become decorously grave, though his eyes were still shining—and made the sign of the cross with it

over the crowd. There was a general movement. Men tore off their hats, women bowed their heads, and those who were not too densely packed attempted to kneel. Hat in hand, I looked round for Dick.

He was among the few who had got down on to their knees. He, the incorrigible pagan, knelt at my side! The Clock did not need hands; it was "telling eternity!"

At last Crazy Sammy's prayers had received an answer—an amazing answer! But, then, Crazy Sammy himself lay under the burning ruins of the south transept, buried beneath the debris of the fallen tower of X Cathedral.

The subsequent events of the war you know. The enemy returned that night, and in the frantic exodus of the inhabitants I lost sight of Dick, nor was I able to get in touch with him again. I joined the colours almost immediately on returning to England, and went on active service; and for three years I was completely cut off from my friends.

At the beginning of this present year I found myself at X. The place is unrecognisable. On the site of the Cathedral, which they have not as yet started to rebuild, there has been erected a large temporary church, a hideous object, but that's by the way. There is an immense run on church accomodation now that all the population goes to Mass—the Cathedral never, since the ages of faith, saw a congregation like that which fills this new

erection. I reached X early in the morning, and was told I might be just in time for Mass if I hurried. An English priest was saying it that morning. As a matter of fact, I got in at the fag end. The priest was in the act of administering Communion as I got there. He was standing facing the people, holding up the Sacred Host, with the words "Ecce agnus Dei!" as I entered. The voice was familiar, and, as I looked at his face, I recognised my old school-fellow Dick!

And then, as I knelt there, on the spot where the great church had stood which was now no more, I knew that I was in the presence of two indestructible things—the living faith of the dead man, reborn in this one on whom he had thrown his mantle, and the Sacred Victim, no longer in the jewelled monstrance, which perished, with its crystal pyx, in the furnace of fire, but the same Body of Christ—Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, for ever.

Such is the story of Crazy Sammy, a long-spun yarn that only hints at the personality which was spared the mal-usage of a public appreciation in the Press (even the episode of the "mad monk" was swamped by greater sensations). I hope it may contain, incidentally, the answer to your questions, although I make no apology for writing it, apart from that. To your first, as to the results of prayer as a witness to the reality of the unseen, I offer

the—excuse the term—"unsquashableness" of Sammy as a more unanswerable phenomenon than any spectacle of favours received. Faith, self-existent and independent of circumstance, is an objective reality implying the substance of the thing hoped for. As to the second, sanity has but one thing to fall back upon when the world pursues its so-called sanity to its logical end, and effaces its own glory—the insanity of the saints.

The third question, which I presume you asked merely in a spirit of pious inquiry, I simply leave. You will be able to answer it as you choose from the story of Sammy's novenas, and of the clock that had no hands.

MRS. BLAKE'S MARY

Some people may wonder why the story of Mrs Blake's Mary comes to be written, being simply an account of how a misapprehension on the part of two worthy people led to a result particularly gratifying to the Papistical mind, and particularly irritating to others—namely, a conversion. Some of these latter might take it as an encouraging sign of grace in an author with a distinct penchant for miracles that the plain facts of the case of Mrs Blake's Mary should be set forth with so much frankness—in matter as well as in diction. Others, knowing the unexampled subtlety of the mind in question, would retain their suspicions. Catholic readers may judge for themselves. Meanwhile, here is the story of Mrs. Blake's Mary:—

It is doubtful if anything beyond the tip of the nose of Mrs Blake's Mary would have found its way inside the shabby swing doors of the very shabby Catholic church in Blanche Street, S.E. 34, had it not been for the fact that Mrs Nappin, Mrs Blake's basement lodger, had to go into the "'Orspital." I can't

remember what her exact complaint was—not even the name by which Mrs Nappin described it with graphic inaccuracy to the lady next to her in the tram-car—but that doesn't in the least matter, there will be enough of "itises" and of the "'Orspital" in this story later on. Mrs Nappin occupied the position of cleaner at St Bridget's, and the appointment of an understudy to take her place during her absence presented certain difficulties which required manipulating. There were plenty of "ladies" connected with St Bridget's who would willingly have taken on Mrs Nappin's job, but the danger was that these new brooms might, in the first place, stiffen up the standard required of a church cleaner, and secondly, step into the job themselves. So Mrs Nappin turned from these members of the household of Faith and fixed on Mrs Blake's Mary as an innocuous deputy. Mary was a skimpy, undersized, but very "willin' little gell," and if she were not a Catholic, at least she wasn't anything else. Her parents had been strict Baptists, but Mrs Blake who had adopted her in her orphaned infancy, was nothing in particular, so Mary had not been brought up to go "anywheres." She was associated in the minds of most people with a pail and a scrubbing-brush. She made the housework her special and unremitting business. There was generally a clout somewhere about Mrs Blake's Mary, if one chanced to meet her. The After-Care Lady had her views

on the subject. Whilst Mary was at school she had suffered from an attack of phlebitis. (Mrs Blake had sniffed slightly at the imputation. "I know," she had observed, "as they do get bitten shockin' at school, but I hopes as I keeps my place free from 'em.") Scrubbing was not, therefore, the ideal occupation for one so delicate, and subject to a recurrence of the complaint. But scrubbing was an instinct in Mrs Blake's Mary. I believe it to be perfectly correct that on the occasion when Mary was sent with a message to the lodgings of her school teacher, whom she adored, that she had been discovered by the latter in the sitting-room, into which she had been shown, vigorously polishing up the finger-plate on the door with the moistened corner of her pinafore. Mary never took flowers to her teacher as the other children did. She was becomingly conscious of what she owed to Mrs Blake, and expressed her gratitude in terms of Universal Polish and Chimpanzee soap. Mrs Nappin had noted Mary working off her debt on the hall lino, and made her application to Mrs Blake for the loan of the child's services. Mrs Blake was agreeable to the suggestion; so, likewise, was Mrs Blake's Mary. She had often peeped into the Popish church—that queer place which smelt of something, apart from people, and where folks knelt about in queer corners all by themselves. It would be a new and thrilling experience to enter it in an official capacity. Pail

in hand, she might stalk (only Mrs Blake's Mary was hardly likely to achieve a stalk with a pail of water weighing her down) all round the eerie building and inspect everything at her leisure. Peeping was fraught with danger of ejection.

Mrs Nappin took Mary over to the church and explained carefully what her duties would be. I regret to say that the spirit of the old builders and decorators of holy places had not descended on Mrs Nappin. She instructed Mary to wash such places as showed, especially the sanctuary steps, and added that, if anyone happened to be praying in the church at the time, Mary was to "do this" when she passed the altar. "You can jist run a cloth over that," Mrs Nappin observed, as they paused before the font. "I only uses the hearthstone once in a way." Mary was somewhat discomfited to find a font there. A friend of hers had once shown her round the big parish church, and had rounded off her creditable explanation of the font and its uses with the disdainful comment, "But that ain't nothink ter do with you. Your parents was Baptists, and you ain't never been baptised." Mary wished somehow that there hadn't been a font—it made her feel an outside sort of feeling. Matters were not improved by a conversation that she overheard between Mrs Nappin and the rector, who chanced to come along the aisle. Mrs Nappin was explaining that she had found a "little gell" to do her work

during her absence. "No, unfortunately the little gell was not a Catholic." "Ah, well," the rector said, "no doubt she's one of God's children. I suppose she's been baptised?" Mrs Nappin's answer did more credit to her resourcefulness than to her sense of veracity, for she knew of Mary's strictly Baptist origin; but the latter had no room to be disedified, she was taken up with the unpleasant consciousness of being something that she ought not to be—an outsider, scrubbing flags and sweeping mattings under false pretences!

So Mrs Nappin entered the "'Orspital" and Mrs Blake's Mary took up her temporary duties as cleaner at St Bridget's Church. The work was in addition to that required by the exigencies of Mrs Blake's establishment, but it was not the tiredness that troubled Mary—it was the sight of the font. At first the latter had a grim fascination for her. She ran the cloth round the basin more often than was required. Then the grimness wore off, and only the fascination remained. She was there one afternoon they brought a baby to be baptised, and after that Mrs Blake's Mary took to hearthstoning the font in the face of Mrs Nappin's dispensation.

Baptisms were the only services at which the understudy assisted. She was a modest little girl, and would not have intruded for worlds. Only on one occasion, quite inadvertently, she got in time for the children's Benediction, which preceded

Christenings. It was an experience for Mrs Blake's Mary. She viewed the monstrance with a professional eye, and wondered who had the job of keeping it bright. It was quite a fruitful subject for meditation during the prayers and singing.

The other thing which troubled Mary was "doing this" when she passed the altar. She tried at first with the pail in her hand—there was no one in the church as a matter of fact, so she was in reality overstepping her instructions, only she had got it into her head that there was some one. At any rate, she had a feeling that the thing had got to be done. Now, a genuflection isn't a thing that comes easy to a British knee—pail or no pail. But Mary, with a resourcefulness worthy of Mrs Nappin herself, solved the difficulty by going down on both knees and telling herself that she was going to clean the altar steps. Later on she found this a way out from the genuflecting business—whenever she had occasion to pass in front of the altar she would kneel down and give the sanctuary step a passing rub over. It was really quite a cunning arrangement. But Mary's embarrassments were not destined to be over when she had "got round the font," so to speak, with a cloth, and manipulated the genuflection difficulty. A new and even more complicated situation presented itself to the outsider as time went on. The people who said their prayers in St Bridget's greatly interested Mary. She had the utmost veneration for people

who could say prayers. She had sometimes heard prayers in chapel—long ones, with long words and phrases in them so intricate in their meaning that they sometimes had to be explained to Almighty God Himself. Ministers prayed, she knew, but she had never seen ordinary people praying like this—all by themselves, and at all times of day. She meditated on the wonder of being able to pray like that whilst she eradicated wedding confetti from the cocoanut matting. Even the lady who lodged a complaint that the temporary child had distracted her whilst she made the Stations of the Cross by proceeding in front of her with a clattering pail won respect from Mrs Blake's Mary. Mary thought it must be wonderful to be able to say a different prayer like that before each picture; and she overheard the lady who had complained telling someone that she had got what she prayed for in spite of the distraction! She contracted a habit of scrubbing the space under the pictures where the pious people knelt—a task which Mrs Nappin would never have dreamt of putting on her, nor anyone else. It must always be borne in mind that Mrs Blake's Mary absolutely overstepped her set duties.

It was through one of these praying-about people who frequent the church at cleaning time that Mrs Blake's Mary became involved in her next embarrassment. Perhaps it would not be quite correct to call him a praying person, though. He

was a young man in khaki, and he specially interested Mary inasmuch as he didn't seem to find it as easy to pray as the others did. He would sit there, gazing in front of him, and he looked rather bewildered and unhappy. One day he came up and spoke to her whilst she was scrubbing the font. He asked a few questions about the clergy and the time that they were to be seen; and then he did a terrible thing. Having asked her her name (he had a kind face although he looked so unhappy), he said, "So you're a Mary too. Will you say a prayer for me to Her?" and he indicated the statue on the Lady-altar by an inclination of his head.

The mischief was that Mary, being a "willin' little gell," she promptly and instinctively answered "Yessir," and the contract was entered into before she knew where she was. She didn't realise what she had let herself in for until after he had gone. Then her dilemma was a serious one. He had mistaken her for an insider and assumed that she knew how to address the Virgin of the statue! The discomfited impersonator of official orthodoxy crept up to the shrine from whence Our Lady looked down on her accredited devotees. It was a beautiful face, Mary thought, as she glanced up. She went down on to her hardened housemaid's knees—the attitude was as natural to her as to the hermits in the desert—and felt that it might not be so very difficult after all to speak to this lady—to find

something to say. Mrs Blake's Mary might, in fact, have achieved a real prayer, sufficient at any rate to justify her "Yessir," but at that moment her eye caught sight of something that had hitherto escaped it. It was a brass plate, green with mildew. It was fixed on the wall, close up to the shrine so as to be almost hidden from view. Mary's professional side immediately asserted itself. Instinctively she got up, and wriggling herself into the corner, applied her apron experimentally to the discoloured surface. It was clearly a case for Chimpanzee soap and a wash-leather. Off she went in search of the latter, completely forgetful of her undertaking to say a prayer to Our Lady for the boy in Khaki.

It proved to be a long task, and a vigorous one, taking the rust and mildew off the brass, but it paid for doing. Bit by bit the obliterated inscription came to light. It was quite a long one, and written in a queer foreign language. It began, "Memorare, O piissima Virgo Maria," and there was quite a lot of it; but Mary persevered with Chimpanzee soap, Universal Polish, and elbow grease—very much of the last—until the inscription had been brought back to light, right up to the last word. She had completely forgotten about the promised prayer, and only remembered it when, a day or two later, she happened to see the boy in khaki standing in front of the Lady-altar. The plate had attracted his

attention, and he was reading what was written on it. Then Mrs Blake's Mary remembered her unfulfilled promise. She devoutly hoped that the young gentleman would not wander round her way and question her. She was almost sorry that she had rubbed up the brass, it might remind him of his request. But the boy in khaki remained absorbed in the perusal of what was written there. He read it over, and again a second time, and Mary could see his lips moving as though he were saying the words out loud. He was looking happier than usual, and he went away without noticing Mrs Blake's Mary. She felt glad somehow that she had polished up the brass plate on the wall by Our Lady's altar.

Next day the boy reappeared again, and this time Mary didn't escape. He found her scrubbing—I think it was in front of the fifth Station—and put the question straight to her—he was looking quite cheerful and rather eager—"Did you do what I asked you the other day?" he queried. "Do you remember I asked you to pray for me to Our Lady?" and in the confusion of the moment Mrs Blake's Mary told what was, I fully believe, quite an indeliberate fib. She replied, "Ye—es, sir." She had indeed gone over and knelt at the altar, and she had meant to try, only the brass plate had caught her eye and, my! it did need a doing!

The boy was obviously pleased at the answer. He thrust his hand into his pocket and brought

out a little leather bag from which he produced a rosary. "I found this in the street," he observed. "It's very shabby, but would you like to have it? I don't exactly use one myself."

Mrs Blake's Mary thrust out an eager hand. Her eyes glistened. One of the desires of her heart was to possess a rosary—like the people who prayed. It was a queer fancy on her part. "I don't mind," she answered modestly, in accordance with the Blanche Street code of manners which observes a becoming detachment in such cases, and the beads passed into her possession.

Then, alack! the donor continued, "You will pray for me when you use it?" And in the absorption of the moment, for a third time, Mrs Blake's Mary answered with a fortuitous "Yessir." It all came of being such a very "willin' little gell."

The usual Nemesis overtook her after he had gone. She slipped the little yellow bag into her pocket. She durst not take the beads out just yet. It might mean that she would have to "use them," and she had not the remotest idea how to! Yet, withal, she felt a curious thrill at the thought of possessing them. The rosary was a treasure that brought untold joy in spite of the "Yessir," which was not an intentional fib.

Scrubbing was hard work that afternoon. Her leg, the groggy one that had suffered from phlebitis, had been giving her excruciating pain. It was a dreadful business finishing the Stations, but she

dragged on until she came to the Third fall, I think it was—and then Mrs Nappin's understudy quietly gave out. One of the prayerful ladies found her lying there an hour later, unable to move, and the Presbytery people fetched a taxi and took her to the " 'Orspital," the same one where Mrs Nappin was completing her cure.

The kind nurses popped Mary into bed and made her extraordinarily comfortable. One of them discovered the beads in her pocket, and with real thoughtfulness gave them to her.

" You'd like to have these to say your prayers on," she said, for she had nursed a number of Irish patients. Then she added, diplomatically, " You'll lie quite quiet and promise not to move or sit up " (for moving or sitting up can prove fatal in a case of phlebitis). " I'm sure you'd like to say your prayers," she repeated, with the subtlety of the highly-trained nurse.

" Yes, m'm," Mrs Blake's Mary said, and stretched out her lean hand for the treasure. The nurse handed the beads to her in their little yellow bag.

When the rector of St Bridget's called to see her in the evening he found her in a deep sleep—it was almost a state of coma. Mrs Nappin's understudy was very, very tired. There was no danger the nurse told him, except in the case of sudden exertion. She was to be kept quiet. " I gave her her beads," the nurse observed; "they were in her pocket."

The rector looked surprised. "So she has a rosary," he said. "That's curious. The child isn't a Catholic."

"She was most anxious to have them," the nurse answered. "She's got them in her hand now."

The rector of St Bridget's pondered. He looked at the little wizened face. She had evidently imbibed some idea of the Catholic Faith, else why should she be using a rosary? In all probability she possessed the desire to be within the Fold. He blamed himself for not having taken more notice of the child, beyond praising her prowess as a scrubber. The rector was troubled and remorseful. He turned to the nurse. "Tell me," he said, "is there any actual danger—any possibility of anything happening—anything immediate?"

"Well, no," the nurse said; "only, you see, in this complaint the slightest exertion may be fatal—any sudden movement—and—it's a full moon to-night, the Germans may be here; and we can't stop the maroons."

The priest made up his mind on the spot. "I'm going to baptise her conditionally," he said. "No. I won't wake her. I'll come and see to her properly in the morning, but I'm not going to risk to-night." So he took water, and with it he conditionally baptised Mrs Blake's Mary as she lay there unconscious, and gave her conditional absolution. It was obvious that she had the desire. The rosary spoke for that. What a blessing it was that the nurse had mentioned it!

There was no raid after all that night. Nothing occurred to disturb the slumbers of the patients. The night nurse, breathing a prayer of thanksgiving, went round to take a last look at her charges before going off duty. When she came to Mrs. Blake's Mary she found that another had been on night duty as well—the soft-footed angel of Death. The child lay calm and peaceful, the rosary clasped in one toil-worn hand and the little yellow leather bag in the other. There was nothing to account for the fatal turn that the illness had taken. The patient had certainly not left her bed nor changed her position. Well, she was better off, poor little thing!

When the rector arrived to visit his charge, the nurse told him what had happened and handed him the rosary. The good padre's heart was full of thanksgiving that he had been inspired to do what had been a somewhat unconventional thing on the impulse of the moment.

He bore the little yellow bag and its contents home with him. He had an appointment with a young soldier from the Front. The lad had been to see him several times, but couldn't make up his mind whether to embrace the "straight religion" or not. He had stuck over the efficacy—or inefficacy—of prayer, and seemed likely to stick indefinitely. The priest found the latter awaiting him in eager impatience. The waverer was actually by way of arriving at a decision. The priest was

as astonished as he was pleased. It seemed like a miracle, for he had almost despaired of the young man, who looked in vain for an answer to prayer to remove his doubts and difficulties.

"Some one has been praying for you?" he queried. as he looked at the boy's changed face.

"You've hit it, Father," was the reply. "And some one's prayers have been answered. That's what has settled me, just about."

"A Catholic friend, I suppose," the Father said.. "Or perhaps the French nuns you told me about?"

"No," was the answer. "I'll tell you who it was. It's the kiddie with the queer little face who cleans up here. I asked her to pray for me—to the Blessed Virgin—a few days ago, and sure enough she—Our Lady—helped me on, and yesterday I gave her some beads I had found and asked her to pray for me again; and I'm certain she has, for it's suddenly got all clear somehow. In the night as I lay awake I suddenly seemed to get hold of it—you know, the give as well as the take—faith, and all that. I would like to know if the kiddie had been praying."

"She was probably praying at that very moment," the priest replied softly. And then he told the boy what had happened—not the whole story, that would come better later on, but he told him the main thing—how the little intermediary whom he had chosen had died during the night with her rosary in her hand, saying her prayers.

It was an astoundingly direct answer to the question in his mind. When he found words, his own answer was to the point. "That settles it," the boy said. The tears were in his eyes—he had lost many pals, and here was another gone. And then he added, "I wonder if she was using the beads I gave her."

"I have them here," the padre said, and pulled the beads out of his trousers-pocket.

The other took them and looked at them. A shadow of disappointment crossed his face. "No," he said "these are not mine. Mine were old and shabby. Still, she was praying—that's the main point. I expect that kiddie was a saint, Father."

"Very likely," the Father acquiesced, and thanked God in his heart that he had received into the visible Fold this strange little outsider whose prayers possessed the power of working miracles.

It was Mrs Nappin who solved the mystery attached to the fatal termination to the illness of Mrs Blake's Mary. When the nurse took Mrs Blake into the mortuary to view the little body, Mrs Nappin now at the point of discharge, was permitted to accompany them. The rector had been there already and replaced the rosary between the fingers of the folded hands.

Mrs Nappin spotted it at once.

"My!" she said, "what's she doin' with a rosary?" The nurse explained. She had it in her hands when

she died. She had been saying her prayers and had taken the beads out of their little bag. She handed the latter to Mrs Nappin. Meanwhile Mrs Blake was fingering the rosary curiously as it lay in the still hands of its owner. The beads were bright and resplendent—all save the last three of the last decade. These were dull and lack-lustre, and the chain was brown with rust. Mrs Blake transferred her scrutiny to the little yellow wash-leather bag that Mrs Nappin handed to her. There were streaks right across it, curious rust-brown markings. "Well, to be sure!" she exclaimed. "That's what she was up to—she was a-cleanin' of it—rubbin' it up with the little bit o' leather, and that's what made an end of her!" She pointed to the three dingy beads. It was towards the end of the fifth decade that Mrs Blake's Mary had been interrupted in the telling of her beads.

Mrs Nappin fingered the beads, comparing the glistening decades with the unfinished portion. "That took doin', I know," she said.

"She was always handy with her leather," Mrs Blake observed. "A very willin' little gell was Mary, and I knew as how she hadn't got religion. Only the day before yesterday she did out the parlour beautiful."

The matter ended there. It was nobody's business to inform the rector of the strange and unusual method by which Mrs Nappin's understudy said her

prayers. The nurse saw that neither of the ladies possessed themselves of the rosary, and it was duly buried with its owner, who received Catholic burial. Mrs Blake, being nothing in particular, took this latter as a delicate attention on the part of the Faithful towards the outsider who had understudied their Mrs Nappin, and raised no objection.

The soldier-boy (who was received the other day) still sets down his final grace to the prayers of Mrs Blake's Mary, and the rector of St Bridget's, in all good faith, encourages him in the idea—he has not the faintest notion that the owner of the rosary to whom he gave conditional baptism and absolution had never said a prayer in her life. He and the soldier-boy continue to remain under an illusion which Mrs Blake's Mary would have been the first to deprecate, for there was nothing deliberately fraudulent about Mrs Nappin's understudy.

Yet it may be possible that the soldier-boy is not so far out, after all, for do not the mystics tell us that there are more kinds of prayer than one? And as for the impulsive padre, personally we venture to think that he was extraordinarily right in administering Baptism to Mrs Blake's Mary under condition, for does there not exist what is theologically known as "baptism of desire"? And the mystics might have told us something more about that too, if they had seen the font at St Bridget's after Mrs Blake's Mary had "gone round it" with a cloth,

THE SIGNORINA AND SISTER COLETTE

COLETTE loved to watch the English Signorina from her corner of the little convent chapel, for she felt certain that if she watched long enough she would see the Signorina in ecstasy. She had a beautiful ascetic face, the Signorina, and as she knelt there, rigidly upright, with closed eyes and immobile lips, Colette felt sure that she had passed from her own elementary stage of vocal prayer into the state of contemplation. Colette often thought that she would have loved to have watched the Signorina after she had received the Holy Communion—surely then she would be in ecstasy—but the Signorina did not communicate at the little village church: Colette had seen her regularly at High Mass, but never in the early morning. She seldom missed Benediction at the Franciscan convent, so Colette, who never missed by any chance, had plenty of opportunity of observing the saint of her devotion.

As for the English Signorina, she had also taken notice of Colette, and the eager-eyed girl who gazed

so wistfully at the grille behind which the nuns prayed appealed likewise to her interest—she liked to feel that Colette had lingered and was praying while she herself knelt in the traditional attitude and "absorbed the atmosphere of prayer."

This atmosphere of prayer was one of the things that the English Signorina had discovered in Italy, and it was interesting as a psychic experience. In the year 1856 psychology had scarcely begun to patronise religion, and to clothe the old "superstition" in a permissibly intellectual garb. "These Italian peasants will amuse you with their religious superstitions," the Signorina's brother, who was a "free-thinker," wrote, "that is, if they don't disgust you." The Signorina wrote back that she was quite well amused. The Italians were charming, and so sincere in their faith that they could never disgust one like the English Christians did. A few weeks later she had written:—"The peasant folk are delightful. I took part in one of their religious processions yesterday, and carried a lighted candle! They all think I am one of the Faithful, and I feel rather a hypocrite." The Signorina's brother chuckled over the letter. He was a leading light among the intellectuals who later on became known as Agnostics, when their Pope, Professor Huxley, formulated the dogma of the Unproveability of God.

Colette had an intense longing to become person-

ally acquainted with the Signorina with the beautiful ascetic face. She heard stories of the lady's works of mercy among the poor in the little town. The beggars and children adored her. It would be a privilege indeed to speak with this sweet St Elizabeth-like lady, whose kindly voice Colette had often listened to talking excellent Italian as she walked behind the Signorina and her friends from the church door. It may have been the novena that she made to her patron, St Colette, that produced the long-desired thing, but anyway, one morning—it was Corpus Christi Sunday, as a matter of fact—the Signorina turned and spoke to Colette of her own accord, remarking on the weather and the prospects for the afternoon's procession. Colette flushed crimson with pleasure, and returned a shy answer with a very pretty smile. The Signorina was delighted with her. And so the acquaintance began. They walked side by side that afternoon in the procession, and henceforward the melody of *Lauda Sion* was more than ever heavenly for Colette. The Signorina wrote home to her brother:—"I am enjoying myself more than ever. The fairy tales of our youth are nothing compared with the delicious religious folklore of these dear people. I walked in the Corpus Christi procession yesterday with a delightful child who told me all about St Francis afterwards. He is a most charming saint, by the by, as human as you or I, and even more humane! This

child thinks that I believe all that she does, and it makes me feel a terrible fraud, but it would be sacrilege to undeceive her."

She got back a letter of mock warning. "Remember," her brother wrote, "you are playing with fire. These færie folk may cast a spell over you and when you return to prosaic England you will be seeking admission to the Fold from the Reverend Dr Wiseman!"

The Signorina read the letter, and felt a sudden thrill—if only fairy tales were true! Then she began to feel rather creepy. Spells are more easy to believe in than other unseen influences. Suppose that Fate intended her to become a Roman Catholic? How queer! The menace was not without its fascination.

One of the Signorina's chief pleasures was to hear Colette talk. The latter had no idea that her listener was anything but orthodox. I think the Signorina was quite right not to undeceive her. She was the most tender-hearted of women, and she would not have upset the child's faith for worlds. The discovery that the Signorina was not a Catholic would have shaken Colette's universe, so she listened while the girl poured out the story of her dreams and aspirations, and did penance for her fraudulency by an abiding qualm of conscience.

The Signorina soon found out that the reigning desire in Colette's heart was to join the community

at the convent. From a child it had been her dream, but, alas! Colette's parents, unwilling to lose their child, placed an effective obstacle in her way by declaring that they could not afford to pay the *dot* required by the rule of the Order. Had they really been poor folk, the Reverend Mother might have waived the question of dowry, but where the ability to pay existed, this could not be done, so poor Colette seemed to have been baulked in her vocation.

The Signorina was touched by the girl's story. The cloister was so obviously the place for this simple, ardent soul who already helped to make its atmosphere of prayer. She waxed highly indignant with the selfish parents who were deliberately baulking their child's natural bent. The Signorina was a lady who could be indignant with a whole heart—there were people who said that she enjoyed a fight for its own sake. Anything in the shape of authority, moreover, roused her instinctive opposition. The Church's authoritative attitude counterbalanced for her much of its "færie" charm, and effectively broke the spell that might have drawn her towards the parlour of Dr Wiseman. She pondered over the matter, and finally determined to pay the dowry herself—"Just to serve the parents right," she told herself. The Signorina told herself many things of the same nature as those she told her brother, and I believe she accepted them as readily as he did! She ascertained from Colette the sum required. It

was not a large sum, and if the Signorina had been a rich woman she need hardly have missed it, but she was not a rich woman, and it meant a considerable sacrifice to provide the wherewithal for making Colette a nun. She wrote to her brother and asked him to see to the selling out of some of her stock, but she didn't attempt to explain the purpose that she proposed to put the money to—not even as a joke.

When the Signorina told Colette what she meant to do—she gave the girl no chance of refusing—the latter's joy and gratitude were beyond words. "You've got to go," the Signorina said, solemnly; "the obstacle has been removed. Providence has arranged it."

Colette noted that it was the first time that the Signorina had spoken to her definitely of the will of the Lord in connection with her vocation. It "bucked her up" wonderfully for the ordeal of facing her parents, whose opposition would be broken down by the Signorina's generosity. She threw her arms round the latter's neck. "I will pray for you always—always!" she cried. "I will ask God's best blessing for you."

"The greatest blessing is health," the Signorina said. She had been ailing lately. Italy had not done for her all that she expected, and ill-health was the thing that she dreaded most.

"I will pray," Colette said, "that you get all the things that you desire."

"You will have to look after me," the other said, with an embarrassed little laugh—she was recalling a wish that she had "wished" at the old wishing well a few weeks before, when one of the party had said, "Now, all wish!" she had wished that "the fairy tale might be true"—and then she added, "I shall be your child now, Colette."

Colette laughed merrily at the Signorina's humour. It was too comical! The Signorina her child? The Signorina was her patroness, her patron saint! She gathered up the other's hands and kissed them; and then she kissed her on the cheeks—once on each cheek and back again, as the nuns did in honour of the Blessed Trinity. For a moment the Signorina held her in her arms. "I am *your* child," Colette whispered. But the Signorina shook her head.

Before the Signorina left for England Colette had been clothed and become "Sister Colette," keeping her saint's name. She was radiantly happy. She had now to speak to the Signorina through a grille, and it was no longer possible for the little nun who "kept her eyes in order" to watch her patron in contemplation; but what did all that matter? Life was such a little moment. Soon she and the Signorina would be walking together in the gardens of Paradise, looking on the eternal hills; and when she—Colette—enjoyed the Beatific Vision, she would assuredly put her hand out and find the Signorina's

and they would clasp tight to communicate their joy as they kept their eyes on the Vision, for the latter, embracing all joy, would thus include intercourse with those we had loved in Christ below. So Sister Colette argued, and I think she was theologically sound.

So Colette applied herself to her prayers, and the Signorina returned to England.

Back in her native land, the Signorina grew strangely home-sick for Umbria, and for the Umbrian "Fairy Tale." She started to write a book on Italian churches, and became the outspoken champion of the form of Christianity which was in the minority in England. The Padre, who of course knew her secret, had looked at her wistfully as she bade him "Good-bye." "You will come into the Church some day," he had said.

"Before I die," she had answered, smiling, "but not before. I would gladly die in Holy Church, but I could not live in it—and do as I was told!"

The Padre had shaken his head. "Death jumps on us unawares," he had replied, solemnly, "and the dispositions change. Have a care, my daughter, how you tempt God."

"But I *mean* to die a Catholic," the Signorina said, smiling defiantly at him; "you must pray for me Father!" It had been a comfort to feel that she need not be a hypocrite with the Padre. He knew her secret.

The Umbrian home-sickness increased. The Signorina began to ponder over the possible consequences of establishing a praying sister to introduce her cause into the Courts of the Unseen. Suppose something *did* happen? Suppose the Infinite Improbability were really there on His Throne, and faith were brought to her like a brace of pheasants, "With Sister Colette's compliments"? Was there some "revenge" in store for the pagan mummer who had carried a lighted taper on Corpus Christi Day?

The Signorina had certainly been playing with fire. I do not know whether it was a spark from one of the candles carried by the little children who tempted Providence with their flimsy white veils, or whether a generous appreciation of holy things is bound to bring its reward, but she became conscious of a still small voice speaking within her soul the undeclarable Name of God. There should have been no withstanding the still small voice; but it must be borne in mind that the Signorina had been brought up in the highly intellectual circle of Agnostics whose search after truth is so exact and accurate that it finally leads them to the conclusion that truth does not exist. Her health had become steadily worse since she had quitted Italy, and "fairy tales" lose their glamour when one's mind is at grips with severe physical pain. So the Signorina continued to worship the "non-existible."

and left the "sweet, impossible things" of religion for a later date. She wrote to Sister Colette and told her of her illness—of the number of months that the doctor had given her. "I shall die a Catholic," she told herself—was there not the possibility of meeting the Galilean Shepherd with His rod and staff in an undisputed Valley of the Shadow? It would be hard to have nothing to give Him as He walked beside her if He were there after all. The God of hell she had no fear of, but would not this itself be hell—to have no gift to offer—to be too late? But it took great courage to offer the gift of faith in England in the year 1856. The Signorina waited her time.

The nuns in the convent in far-away Italy were grieved to hear of the English Signorina's illness. But Sister Colette was not surprised. All God's saints without exception had undergone similar sufferings. It was but the natural outcome of the Signorina's sanctity. Colette wrote to this effect to the sick lady, and begged her efficacious prayers for that egregiously unsuffering little sinner, Sister Colette. There was no answer to this letter; and a little while later there came a communication from the Signorina's relatives informing the Community of her death. She had left instructions that they should be told.

Colette did not weep. The cloister had not made her unhuman, only perfectly simple and consistent.

Why weep? Sea and land would no longer divide them. Letters would be no longer necessary. The saints were within call—the Church had its telephonic communication before men invented their analogous system. She could now talk to her beloved patron, ask for her prayers, and picture her in the Paradise which was far more real to Sister Colette than England. She took the little photographic likeness out of her book and fixed it on to the wall of her cell, near to the picture of St Colette, so that the flowers that she placed near the latter on Feast days might apply to both. St Colette, dear saint that she was, would understand that the extra blossom was meant for the Signorina.

Sister Colette was instructed to pray for the soul of her deceased benefactor, and this she did, under obedience, but she entertained no doubt whatever as to the dead woman's sanctity. She lamented that, living in a heretical country like England, the Signorina would have none to bring her "cause" forward for her beatification. England never produced blesseds. Who could be expected to work miracles in England? For perhaps a month, or six weeks, Sister Colette practised her private devotion to her departed patron, passing on to "Ora pro me" from an adequately conscientious "De Profundis," and dreaming contentedly of the ever approaching day of their reunion. Then there was an interruption. One day the Padre brought a friend to see the

convent, an English gentleman it was. The visitors were offered hospitality, and Sister Colette was told off to wait on the guests, who were feasted in the parlour with true Franciscan bounty. As the bell on the dinner-table only gave vent to a faint tinkle, Sister Colette was instructed to wait outside the door for her summons. The conversation between the visitors was in Italian, and I don't in the least mind confessing that Sister Colette listened unblushingly, with all her ears, as she waited. She had no nice feelings in the matter. Soon their chat assumed a most interesting character. The English gentleman proved to be a friend of the Signorina's. "Very sad her death was," the Padre commented. "Is it really a fact that she never got the Faith after all?"

"Unfortunately, yes," the other replied. "I enquired most stringently of her relatives. It seemed incredible that she should have died outside the Fold after getting so near, but they assured me that she died, as she had lived, an unbeliever. It was never any more than the æsthetic side that attracted her. It was an idea, nothing more; she never got really near to believing. She treated religion as a sort of game of play."

The Padre pondered. "I believed that she was a Catholic for quite a long time," he said. "She liked people to think that she was a Catholic. It was pride that kept her outside, but I hoped that she

would come in the end—especially when God in His mercy sent her the suffering."

The other sighed. "If anything," he said, "she receded at the end. At one time she read spiritual books, and even tried to pray, but there was nothing of that at the end—nothing."

"Ah, well," the Padre said, "Faith is a gift, after all," and he dismissed the matter briskly by striking the bell in front of him. Colette obeyed its summons. The kindly Padre cracked a little joke, and she smiled demurely. She changed the soiled plates and fetched the second course of viands from the kitchen. Then she took up her stand again in the dark passage between the parlour and the kitchen.

She listened no more to the conversation. The place where she stood was pitch-dark, and a step might land one in the abyss of the coal-cellar. It was typical of Sister Colette's universe at that moment. The ground had gone from under her feet, and there was black horror all round. The Signorina, her patron saint, no longer existed—had never existed. That was the horror. There stood in her place a shallow deceiver—a mocker of the things she had appeared to love.

It was impossible to grasp it all at once. An unbeliever, the Signorina, who had looked God in the eyes at Benediction and bowed her head at Mass! The Englishman's words repeated themselves

like hammer-blows on her brain. Sister Colette could not have explained the subtle horror of it all, the hideous irony, but she appreciated it to the full. Mocking fiends reminded her of the Signorina's " devotions "—of her little room in the villa with its exquisite statue of Our Lady, before which a lamp was always burning. The Christ Himself had looked down from its walls, carved in ivory, and hanging on His Cross. And at the end there had been—"nothing of that, nothing at all." The bell tinkled again, and Sister Colette performed her offices for the second tie. "You look tired, child," the kind Padre said, but Sister Colette assured him that she was not tired. Tired! Ah, but she was tired! Tired of self, of life, of God Himself, who had allowed her to pray for the Signorina as one of His chosen ones while she was merely making " a game of play " of His holy things. She went through the rest of the day mechanically doing her duties, which, mercifully, were numerous. She repeated her Office, recited the common prayers, and then she retired to her cell and the pains of hell closed round her. She was in the Valley of the Shadow with one who had driven away the rod and the staff! How could the Good Shepherd walk beside one who had declined His company? God does not force Himself on souls when they are no longer free agents, or to what end does man possess free will? She could not so much as endure to look at the picture of the Signorina on

the wall of her cell. The fiends were roaring with laughter at the little bunch of flowers that St Colette was sharing with the "saint" of Colette's bamboozled imagination.

It may be reckoned that Sister Colette remained in the Valley of the unmitigated Shadow for about three days. She accepted the suffering as something that was intended. It could not go on long. It was too intense. God does not leave our souls in hell. At the end of three days she took herself in hand. She approached the picture of the Signorina, the little faded photographic likeness, and took it down and surveyed it bravely. The shrewd, attractive face, with its wonderful eyes, looked at her. Behind the eyes she read wistfulness, discontent, and appeal. There surged up a great wave in her heart. Something was lifted. The Signorina had *wanted* to believe. Pride had kept her back? Ah, but we all have pride, even cloistered nuns, and faith is a gift. Sister Colette, gazing at the still beloved face, recalled her intercourse with its owner. She remembered that the Signorina had never deliberately deceived her. She—Colette had assumed that she was a Catholic, and the other had not gone out of her way to deny it. That might well have been from a kindly desire to spare her feelings. And the Signorina *did* love Catholics and the Catholic Faith. She had looked with holy eyes on holy things. Above all she had

been instrumental in enabling Colette to follow her holy vocation. The Signorina, in any case, had an abiding claim on Sister Colette. Then the little nun recalled the words, "You must look after me, for I shall be your child now, Colette." She looked into the eyes in the portrait and read the tragedy there—for the first time; and yet the Signorina had looked exactly like that when she had said those apparently playful words, "I shall be your child, Colette." Colette sunk on to her knees and pressed her hands to her bosom. A fierce thrill of tenderness pierced her being. The "mother-feeling" had been born in her. She could save her child, even now! There is a genius of resource that belongs to motherhood. Colette argued to herself, Does not all time lie like a map under the eye of Almighty God? The Signorina might have got the grace of faith at the last moment—for who can say what passes in the soul of those who have passed into apparent unconsciousness? She would pray, pray, pray, that God might have whispered His name into her ear, and that the Signorina might have made her act of faith, and in God's "Now" her tardy prayers might have been foreseen and answered. It was not too late. She could pray, aye and merit, for the Signorina in God's "Now." She kissed the photograph and placed it in her book of prayers. The Signorina would want so many of them. Her sorrow was by no means

removed. There was still the terrible recurring dream in which the Padre and his friend would repeat their conversation, and the dull pain on waking up and remembering the deathbed where there was "Nothing, nothing at all"; but these pangs Sister Colette offered up cheerfully for her intention, and her life went on sweetly and serenely, and the "motherly" little nun became a great favourite, especially with those who needed comfort.

Sister Colette told no one what she had overheard in the parlour. Very probably the nuns knew the Signorina's secret, as the Padre had done, and had refrained from telling her the true state of things; but anyway the secret was hers and she kept it, praying constantly that the Signorina might be in enjoyment of the Vision which is for those who have not turned away from the light. The recollection of the Signorina kneeling in church "in contemplation" must evermore bring its pang now in place of sweetness. The face with the closed eyes turned up towards the light! Every tender memory was changed, as it were, to a purgatorial pain. The light that would lighten the eyes of the Signorina must burn the heart of Sister Colette in God's "Now."

It might have been a couple of years after the visit paid to the convent by the Padre and the Englishman that another English visitor presented herself and asked to see one of the nuns. "Send

Sister Colette," the Reverend Mother said, "she speaks a little English," but before the messenger had reached the door she called her back. "No," she said, "Sister Colette will be wanted in the laundry; send Sister Josephine."

So Sister Josephine went instead of Sister Colette and interviewed the Englishwoman, who had heard of the convent from a lady whom she had nursed in England. Sister Josephine was a novice, and novices have little intercourse with professed sisters, so Sister Colette did not so much as learn that an Englishwoman had visited the convent. Little things are not repeated and talked over in convents in the way outsiders imagine—the life of contemplatives, especially, is too busy for that sort of thing. And so the years went on.

The things that really matter in convents are not visits from the outside world. One day one of the novices came to the Reverend Mother. She had been instructed to exchange her book of devotions for the worn and tattered one used by Sister Colette. The novice had displayed an over-niceness about the binding of books, so this was to be her discipline. Sister Colette had parted with her book with the utmost readiness, but on looking through it, its new "holder" had discovered an old, faded photograph. This she had hastened to return to Sister Colette, but the latter had refused to take it back—she was a very holy nun—on the ground that she had been

told to exchange the book as it stood: nuns sometimes slip holy pictures into their prayer manuals, and an exchange includes these menaces to a complete detachment. The kind-hearted novice had come to the Superior for instructions. The Reverend Mother looked at the photograph, faded almost beyond recognition. "That is the lady who paid Sister Colette's dot," she said. "She is under an obligation to pray for her, and this reminds her of it." So she took the ancient photograph and wrote on the back in her firm, legible handwriting, "For the use of Sister Colette," and returned it to its former guardian, to have and to hold for the term of her life, under the rule of holy obedience.

Sister Colette was one of the oldest nuns in the Community. She was in her eightieth year, but she still retained all her faculties in a wonderful way, except that she was a little hard of hearing, but even that infirmity was hardly apparent. Sister Colette was a gentle, patient soul who bore all things quietly and serenely. At the Conferences, when the Reverend Mother, a very remarkable woman, illustrated her subject with little well-told stories and anecdotes, Sister Colette, unable to catch what was being said, would sit quietly sewing, no one even realising that she could not hear. As she was never appealed to for an opinion, like the younger nuns, who were of a somewhat intellectual type

nowadays, it didn't really matter. Sometimes, when a smile, or a little laugh, went round among the listeners, for the Superior was a very witty speaker, Sister Colette would look up wistfully, and smile in sympathy with the rest without knowing the joke. There was one story that the Reverend Mother told rather effectively. It was a curious, tragical story, in a way, and she always lowered her melodious voice in the telling. Sister Colette, from her place at the far end of the room, never caught a syllable of it by any chance. The story was used as an illustration of God's justice and His mercy when they appear to contradict one another. The Reverend Mother always repeated it for the benefit of the new-comers, for the Conferences were for the professed Sisters only.

There had been a Profession in the convent, and four novices had taken their vows. The new arrivals were always placed next to the Reverend Mother at their first Conference. As they were about to take their places the latter noticed one of them, Sister Angela, looking at her hesitatingly. She was a beautiful girl, with an eager, intelligent face and starry eyes that still held the vision of the morning.

"What is it that you want to say, Sister?" she asked.

Sister Angela hesitated, but hesitation is an ill-fulfiling of the rule of obedience, so she spoke up frankly and without apology.

"I was wondering," she said, blushing furiously at her audacity, "if I might be allowed to change places with Sister Colette. She's been telling me that she never hears a word of the Conference from where she sits. She is getting a little deaf, she says." The Sister smiled.

"Why, poor old dear!" the Reverend Mother cried, "I ought to have thought of that. She shall sit close up to me, and I will take pains to speak very distinctly. How thoughtless I have been!" The Superior, being a very remarkable woman, was the humblest of souls. Her self-reproach was perfectly sincere. The result was that Sister Colette was moved into a seat between the Reverend Mother and Sister Angela, and all through the ensuing Conference the former kept her voice at a certain pitch, never once relapsing into the low, effective tone that the nuns admired so much.

The subject of the Conference was God's mercy, and how it is exalted above His justice, as St James has it. The story which the Reverend Mother always told to illustrate her point was familiar to most of the hearers, but it was new to the brides of the morning, for whose benefit it was being re-told, and it was new to Sister Colette.

"Many many years ago," the narrator said, "there came an English lady to stay in the village here. I heard her story from our old Reverend Mother, and from Sister Josephine (Sister Josephine was also de-

ceased.) She was a woman of noble character, with the highest ideals, but she was what is quaintly called a 'free' thinker. That is to say, she was free to think about anything she liked except Almighty God—Almighty God was, according to the dogma of the free-thinkers, unthinkable. Consequently this English Signorina had only thought about God as a dogmatic negation when she came to Italy." The listeners smiled—all except Sister Colette. She heard the joke this time for herself, and saw nothing to smile at. "Italy, however," the speaker went on, "showed religion in a new light to this lady from England. Being a noble-hearted woman, with natural religious instincts, it made an instant appeal to her. She took an immediate delight in the ceremonies of the Church, and then, being possessed of a swift and powerful intellect, she began to make a study of the Church's teaching. Theology, natural, dogmatic, and mystical, she found absorbingly interesting as a study. She enjoyed herself among the books as much as she did in the churches. She became familiar not only with the ordinary treatises on Catholic doctrine, but with the writings of St Theresa and St John of the Cross, She devoured St Thomas Aquinas as well as Thomas-à-Kempis; and at the end of it all she looked on the story of Immortality as unproven. She told our old Reverend Mother, 'I shall die a Catholic, but I have not yet got faith.' She said the same thing to the Padre. And yet she had paid the *dot* of one of

the nuns in the convent—I think it must have been Sister Josephine—I was never told; but it was Sister Josephine who heard the end of her story from the woman who nursed her in her last illness." The speaker broke off.

"Can you hear, Sister?" she enquired of Sister Colette.

"Perfectly," the other answered. She had forgotten her knitting, and her busy fingers were idle.

"Well, the lady returned to England," the speaker continued, "and became the champion of Catholicism against the Protestant bigotry of the age. This attitude was permitted her since it involved no submission to a truth outside the mind of the thinker. But Almighty God does not allow Himself to remain 'a hypothesis in a soul into which He has infused such noble qualities. This soul began to realise the Person behind the idea, the Umbrian home-sickness became a home-sickness of a larger kind. The illness from which she had been suffering took a fatal turn. She told her nurse that she intended to die in the Catholic Church, but she made no effort to send for a priest. 'Not yet,' she would say when the nurse asked if that were what she wanted—for that she wanted something was evident. And so the end crept nearer."

The narrator paused, but she did not lower her voice. She continued in the same distinct tones, quite spoiling the artistic effect. She had not forgotten that one of her listeners was hard of hearing.

"At length," she said, "the sufferer fell into the state of coma which precedes death, and from which, according to normal medical experience, there is no rousing the patient. It was about three o'clock in the early morning. The nurse was keeping vigil by the bedside. The dying woman's relations were in bed, ready to be called if the change came, and there was a next-door neighbour who had been very kind and attentive, whose window could be reached from the balcony of the sick-room. She was a very devout woman—a Protestant of the Quaker sect. Her only son had become a Catholic and a priest, and was out on the foreign missions. 'Call me if you require help,' she had said. So the nurse sat and waited for the change. Then, suddenly, the moribund woman opened her eyes. 'A priest,' she whispered—'fetch a priest, in case—in case He is there. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow" '—she was quoting the psalms. 'He may be there, with His rod and staff.' The look of anguish in her eyes was so intense that the nurse was terrified. The request was repeated, but the nurse had no idea where a priest was to be found. She had indeed taken the precaution of asking the sick woman, but the latter had always turned the question aside—for the time being. In her dilemma she rushed out on to the balcony, and tapping on the next-door window, roused the neighbour and told her what was happening.

"'I have my son at home with me,' the other

replied. 'He is stopping in London for two nights. He will be with you in less than five minutes.'

"And sure enough, in five minutes' time, the nurse found the priest waiting on the doorstep. He followed her upstairs. The patient was still conscious, and the eloquent eyes were still asking their question. In another five minutes the waters of baptism had flowed over the brow where the dews of death had already gathered." The narrator's voice, which should have been lowered at this period, was slightly raised. She was doing artistic penance for her forgetfulness of poor Sister Colette and her infirmity. "Then a wonderful smile of joy overspread the dying face, and once again she repeated the words, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow, I shall fear no evil—no—evil.' The Signorina had made her act of faith, of submission; she was now making her act of love. Then she closed her eyes and went quietly back into her last sleep."

The hush was sudden, for the Reverend Mother had been speaking loud. It was broken by a thud which made some of the nervous nuns jump. Sister Colette had let fall the heavy book of prayers that lay on her lap. Sister Angela stooped quickly and picked it up for her, together with something that had fallen out of it. It was an old yellowish card that might have been a photograph. Written on the back, in faded ink, were the words: "For the use of Sister Colette."

"Did you manage to hear, Sister?" the Reverend Mother asked.

"Every word," Sister Colette replied. She was smiling very contentedly.

The speaker went on:—

"And now, I want to know how the story strikes you." She addressed one of the newly professed Sisters—a girl with a good-looking, commonplace countenance and a ready smile.

"I didn't expect the ending," was the candid answer. "I thought the lady was going to die as the priest entered the room."

The Mother smiled. "And you?" she asked of another.

The Sister addressed puckered her brows. She was troubled.

"It—it doesn't seem quite right," she stammered. "Not quite fair. I don't see how Almighty God could do it, even if He wanted to. She—according to our lights—she didn't deserve it. She took all and gave nothing."

The Mother turned to Sister Angela, whose starry eyes still retained the vision of the Bridegroom. "And you, Sister Angela?"

"I think," Sister Angela answered, fixing her bright eyes on the other, "that someone may have deserved it for her. Someone who loved her so much that they would not have grudged suffering for her. She may have merited such a love by her

goodness, so it would be quite fair—in an indirect sort of way——" she stopped speaking and blushed.

The Mother's eyes shone. "You believe," she said, "that we poor human beings may sometimes be used to release God's mercy from the toils of His justice? So do I, and so, I believe, does the Church. Someone may have earned that last grace for the poor lady. Someone, as you say, who loved her, for all vicarious suffering must be willing suffering, and joyful suffering. . ." The discussion drifted on till it was time for Compline, and after Compline, bed. Sister Angela gave her arm to old Sister Colette, for she appeared to be rather shaky. She was rewarded by a radiant smile from the old woman, who was looking extraordinarily young and happy. Almost as young, and quite as happy, as the nun whose bridal day it was. "God is good," Sister Angela thought to herself, as she went to her own cell, "to let me see how much pleasure I have been able to get for the poor old dear by asking Reverend Mother to let her have my seat."

As for Sister Colette, alone in her cell, she stood for a moment rapt in thought. Then she threw out her arms and drew them back as though she were embracing something to her bosom; and then, unknowingly, for the first time after sixty years, she broke the rule of the great silence that follows Compline. "My child!" she cried out loud. "Oh, my child! my child! My dear, dear, child!"

THE LITTLE GIRL WHO SMILED BACK

IMELDA behaved quite beautifully in the Corpus Christi procession up to a certain point. The lady in the wheeled chair occurred at the certain point, and thereby hangs my story.

Imelda's inclusion in the procession had been a problem with which the Sisters had been brought face to face owing to the child's over-weening desire to take part in it. It was curious. Imelda was not the kind of little girl who ought to have possessed an over-weening desire to do anything so decorous and little-girlified as to wear a white frock and veil and behave becomingly. Imelda was a fidgety, tiresome, quick-silver morsel of humanity. It was certainly not the white frock and veil that had tempted her, as it tempted normal little girls. White frocks were a responsibility which Imelda incurred with reluctance, and a veil was an appendage that she could never be expected to negotiate properly; yet the one desire of Imelda's life was to walk in the Corpus Christi procession.

It was certain that she could not go with the other little girls of her own age who came immediately in front of the canopy. Imelda would never achieve a courtesy! That was a foregone conclusion; and as to learning to walk backwards?—walking forwards was difficulty enough with Imelda. She either danced, pranced, or stumbled. She had a habit, too, of suddenly standing still to take cognisance of something that didn't in the least matter—she was an awful child to take out for a walk. She had been known to completely disorganise the school crocadile on its way to church. The problem was finally solved by Imelda being placed in charge of her two (comparatively) big sisters. Sister Mary Philomena gave her instructions suited to her seven years as to behaviour, particularly as to the custody of the eyes. Imelda was told that, above all things, she was not to look about. Sister Mary Philomena rubbed this in assiduously, for Imelda was madly interested in things around her. She lacked concentration, her teachers said, and I suppose they knew.

So Imelda, duly instructed, walked in the procession round the church with Clare and Theresa, her two exceedingly well-conducted sisters. The point at which she ceased to behave, as I have said, was when they were passing the lady in the wheeled chair. The chair had been brought into church while the children were being marshalled under the west

gallery. It was carried bodily up the steps from the vestibule by four stalwart male members of the congregation—there had been a regular rush to perform this office, and Imelda was thrilled as she watched. There was something curiously thrilling to Imelda's mind in being thus carried into church, just like God. She had always wondered how God liked being carried about—having to wait on the altar until the priest fetched Him. It must be strange to have a body that couldn't move one tiny bit of itself. Most little girls would have felt sorry for the occupant of the chair—a little "oo-ah!" of commiseration went round as the latter made its appearance, but Imelda didn't feel like that a bit. She thought it must be grand and wonderful and thrilling to be just like God in church; and she thought and thought until Sister Philomena tapped her briskly on the shoulder and called her to attention. Sister Philomena felt there would be trouble with Imelda, with her inconsequent mind and roving eyes.

Imelda walked between her sisters and kept her eyes admirably in order until her part of the procession reached the space under the west gallery. She was aching with curiosity to know what the occupant of the wheeled chair looked like. Everybody in the world was wildly interesting. What would the human being in the wheeled chair be like? When they got close up to it the temptation proved too much. Imelda lifted her bright black eyes from

the tips of her fingers, devoutly placed together, and darted a swift glance at the occupant of the chair.

She caught sight of a face, a pale face, a pair of large forget-me-not blue eyes, and—a smile! That was the strange part of it—a smile and a big one, in church, and at procession time! What would Sister Philomena say if she could see it? And the lady was smiling straight at her—she was not keeping the beautiful forget-me-not eyes in order a bit, yet she was quite grown up—oh, *quite!* She was returning Imelda's gaze with the utmost interest, and she smiled until Imelda found herself smiling back. It was not really her fault. They turned the chair a little as the procession passed, and Imelda thought again of the good God who was also being moved about. She wished that she could see Him like she was seeing the lady in the chair; she wondered if He was as beautiful as that. Oh, would His eyes be as soft and loving as that, and would He look as happy? Oh, what a pity it was that no one could see Him! Imelda forgot everything else. All Sister Philomena's careful instructions fled from the flighty little head that Imelda frankly turned sideways as she looked at the lady in the chair, still smiling in her direction. She took no notice of where she was going. Suddenly the procession halted, and Imelda, engrossed in wondering whether the lady in the chair loved processions with Our Lord in them as much as she did,walked on—right into the child

in front of her. Their veils became entangled, and Imelda's very nearly came off. Her sisters were dreadfully shocked. So was Imelda. A positive terror overtook her. What dreadful thing had she done? She sought out Sister Philomena afterwards and confessed that she had been looking at the lady in the chair on wheels. Sister Philomena was really shocked. It was dreadful to stare at a lady in a chair. Ladies in chairs objected to be stared at by little girls. One might almost have imagined that Sister Philomena was more shocked at Imelda's bad manners than at the grave offence of not remaining recollected on so solemn an occasion. But it must be remembered that Sister Philomena was a school-mistress as well as a nun.

"But the lady didn't mind," Imelda ventured to argue, "she kept smiling at me, and "—it was as well to make a clean breast of everything—"and I smiled back."

Imelda went home grieved in spirit. Sunday dinner was shorn of its joys by a conscience pain which took away her appetite. Her sisters had carried home the terrible story of her behaviour in looking about her and tumbling over Jane Smith. At afternoon catechism, however, she received some consolation. The Father told them how Our Lord sometimes appeared to the saints in the Blessed Sacrament in the form of a little child. Imelda swung her feet about in sheer joy at the idea that

came to her. She propounded it afterwards to Clare and Theresa on their way home. "Do you think," she asked, "that Jesus could have been a little child in the procession this morning?"

Clare and Theresa thought that it was quite possible, having absorbed the instruction into their well-ordered young minds. Imelda drew in a quick breath. "A *very* little child?" she queried. Clare and Theresa thought it might be possible, the Father had called Him a babe.

"Then, perhaps," Imelda said, "He looked at the lady in the chair, too, when He was carried past."

Clare was too shocked to reply, but Theresa had a didactic mind. "He wouldn't need to look," she said. "God can see everything without looking about. He could see the lady in the chair if He wanted without looking at her."

"He'd sure to want to," Imelda said, softly. She was only partly comforted. It had been so grand to walk in the procession, and she had tried so hard, so very hard, to behave.

Imelda looked in vain on the succeeding Sundays for the lady and the chair. The lady's face haunted her. She dreamt of her at night, and made up stories about her in the day-time. She somehow felt that the lady was a friend of hers, although they had only once smiled across at one another—and that at the wrong time, too!

She was sure the lady was a princess—or perhaps

a saint? Only, if the latter, why had she not kept her eyes in order in church? It was perplexing.

Then another thrilling thing happened. Imelda was in church one afternoon all by herself—it was just after Benediction, and she was allowed to trot home alone, so she had stopped on to look at the tabernacle and think things—things that no one ever heard. Not Sister Philomena, and certainly not Clare or Theresa.

Suddenly she noticed, kneeling near her, a woman dressed like a nurse, whom she recognised as the attendant of the lady in the chair. As Imelda watched her, duly thrilled by the discovery, a most extraordinary thing happened, and kept on happening. First someone came up and whispered a question in the nurse's ear, received an answer, and went promptly off with a beaming countenance and set up a candle before Our Lady. Then someone else crossed over and did exactly the same thing. The kneeling woman was again interrogated, and Our Lady got another candle. This occurred with no less than half a dozen people. Imelda watched with fascinated eyes and longed to know what it all meant. She crept nearer to the informative woman and contrived to hear the question asked by the next inquirer. She gathered from it that the lady whom the nurse looked after had been very dangerously ill, but that she was now out of danger. She would not die, the doctor said, but it was more doubtful than ever if she would ever

be able to walk. That accounted for the chair not having appeared again. Imelda throbbed with excitement. There were no less than a dozen candles burning now before Our Lady. People had got the news, one from another, Imelda's sharp eyes had marked the whole thing, and all sorts of people—rich people, poor people, nice people, nasty people (apparently)—and they all put up candles to Our Lady. They were all as glad as that, that the lady in the chair wasn't going to die!

Imelda crossed over to the Lady chapel. She happened to possess a penny, and she longed to put up her candle with the others. She, too, felt—oh, ever so glad that the lady in the chair wasn't going to die. But, alas! she remembered that she had been forbidden to light candles ever since she had burnt the sleeve of her best frock while setting up a candle on the top ring for her best friend's puppy, sick of the distemper. She stood, penny in hand, contemplating the illumination wistfully when there chanced to come up the Funny Father. The Funny Father was an old priest who said funny sort of things. Even grown-up people didn't always understand him, although he never used very long words. Most people loved him, but some said that he was queer. Some people didn't like the Funny Father at all. Imelda admired him even when he bewildered her. They were great friends.

"Well," he asked of her, "are you going to give

Our Lady a candle? What do you want her to give you?"

"It's a Thank-you candle," Imelda explained. "All these are thank-you candles for the lady in the chair because she isn't going to die."

The Funny Father guessed at once whom Imelda meant—he was quite sensible like that. He listened while she told him the story of the origin of the illumination, and, moreover, helped her out of her difficulty by sticking her candle for her in the tip-top socket.

"And so you know the lady in the chair," the Funny Father observed. "Lucky little you!"

"I saw her when I looked up at the Corpus Christi procession," Imelda reminded him—she had already been to confession to the Funny Father, and he had been "very funny" when she had confessed to "smiling back"—oh, very funny indeed! Imelda adored the Funny Father. "And, please, Father," she added, "is she a Princess? Where does she live, please?"

The Father looked at her in his odd way. "Yes," he said, "she's a Princess of Fairyland—God's Fairyland—and the place where she lives is called the little Kingdom of Heaven."

"And where is the little Kingdom of Heaven, please?" Imelda asked.

"It varies," the Funny Father said. "Sometimes it's a big house full of grand people, and sometimes

it's a big house full of sick people, and sometimes it's a little house among poor people, but whichever it is, it's always the little Kingdom of Heaven."

The Funny Father was as difficult to understand as usual, but Imelda had extracted one practical piece of information. She had got the lady's address. How lovely it would be if she could write to her and tell her that she had given Our Lady a thank-you candle along with the others. Imelda longed to do this, she felt so convinced that the Princess would be pleased, but letter-writing is a grave undertaking for a seven-year-old scribe, and in this case no outside aid could be solicited—Sister Philomena would never approve or understand—nobody ever did understand anything that was worth understanding—but the Princess of Fairyland would—the strange fairy-saint who had smiled at her in church.

But Sister Philomena proved to be indirectly useful. The latter was in the habit of giving her charges as a hand-writing exercise the words: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." Imelda had written them laboriously many hundreds of times, and I am sorry to say all she retained, so far as sense went, was a vague idea of little children suffering. The letter killed in Imelda's case, but now she suddenly remembered, when faced with the task of writing the lady's address, that the necessary words occurred in her copy-book exercise—*the little*

children—the *Kingdom of Heaven*—it was all there, and could be copied carefuly on an envelope. The message itself was simple: "Please I put up a candle for you I love you." The signature was a problem. The lady could not be expected to know who Imelda was. A happy inspiration solved the difficulty. Imleda wrote laboriusly under her message the words, "The little girl who smiled back." She felt triumphant. Even if by any remote chance some other little girl had been naughty enough to look up and catch the lady's eye, it was unthinkable that she would likewise have been guilty of the depravity of "smiling back."

Imelda addressed the letter to "The Lady," that would be enough—she couldn't spell Princess, and she added "The Little Kingdom of Heaven" in her best copy-book hand; and since she knew from her mother's correspondence that every letter bears the final direction, "London, W.," she added London, W. Then there came a brilliant idea in the posting of the letter. There was the usual red letter-box in the street, but Imelda had also noticed a letter-box in church. There was a card on it with the word "Questions," and Imelda saw a lot of people post their letters there. It seemed likely to be safer for the Princess's letter, so Imelda popped her missive in with an increased sense of security, and there the Funny Father found it when he opened the box after the Friday evening address to non-Catholics.

The Funny Father was a most reliable postman. He carried the letter intact to the Little Kingdom of Heaven—I doubt if the postman would have identified it—it was quite an ordinary house, and the lady's room was quite simply furnished. There were lots of flowers about, that was all—people would send them—so many flowers that it was difficult to say which was the lady herself, so the Funny Father told someone. He was an Irishman, and like Father O'Flynn, being a priest didn't stop that.

The lady read Imelda's letter and heard its history. She was lying on a sofa, with pains mostly everywhere, but she laughed merrily over the address on the envelope—a little disjointed cadence of shaken-out laughter like the Sanctus bell, as a poet once observed to the Funny Father, who replied, in his queer way, "Of course, my son, it is like the Sanctus bell, for it always sounds in the presence of the King." That was how the Princess came to laugh over Imelda's letter, with the tears standing in her blue eyes.

"I must get to know Imelda," she said. "I remember her quite well—a little black-eyed duck of a child, with a quaint little eager face. If there is a procession next Sunday I'll try to go." She gave a little sigh. She had hoped at the last procession that there might have been a miracle—that she might have got out of her chair and walked

home. She had had a curious feeling that when Our Lord passed by her strength would be given back to her. Next Sunday's procession would only be a procession in honour of Our Lady—the Healing Christ would not pass her way. Still she would make the effort and go, and smile at the responsive little face under the disarranged veil.

Imelda was allowed to take part in the procession of Our Lady after some demur on the part of the Sisters. Once more she walked between Clare and Theresa, and this time she was resolute about keeping her eyes in order—she had promised Our Lady that she would. But what if the Princess was there in her chair? How hard, how desperately hard it would be not to look up. The blue-eyed lady *was* there in her chair! It was the first thing that Imelda "glimpsed" at the far end of the church. Her heart gave a wild bound. But she had solemnly promised Our Lady that she would not lift her eyes once if she were allowed to walk in the procession. Promises must be kept. Imelda wished that she hadn't promised.

When they were actually passing the place where the chair stood the temptation became excruciating. It was the biggest thing that Imelda had ever undergone. In the violence of the momentary struggle she suddenly thought of the little Christ who could see everything without looking up, and she remembered how the nuns had told her that little

children should try and be exactly like the Child Jesus. She had made herself a little prayer (Imelda made up her own prayers, it was much more interesting), "Little Jesus, make me *'xactly* like you." She prayed it now, against the temptation; and then she added, with beautiful frankness, "and 'cause then I should see the lady without looking up."

The intensity of her praying brought Imelda to a complete and sudden standstill. The girl behind gave her a sharp poke. Clare and Theresa seized her hands and dragged her on, but the procession was disorganised for at least three seconds. It was exactly like Imelda. She stumbled on, dazed and benumbed with the hard lines of it all. She had tried so hard, and she received such a scolding. Clare and Theresa split on her to Sister. It was terribly hard luck, and the lady in the chair had seen it all. Strangely enough, this last thought rather comforted Imelda, although she would rather have shocked anyone in the world than the lady in the chair.

She removed her veil tearfully and resumed her hat and crept back into church. Her sisters had gone on with some other girls. Imelda was in no hurry to follow them. She was crying, and church is by far the best place to cry in. Everyone had left the church when she slipped in. No. The chair was still there. Imelda's heart bounded, but,

alack! the chair was empty. That was strange. Imelda crept into the front bench—nearest to the tabernacle. Then she suddenly discovered that someone was in the bench already. It was the lady of the chair. She was kneeling, with her eyes fixed on the altar, very still, but when Imelda gave a little sob she turned round and forgot all about her prayers. It was then that Imelda recognised her. She moved up to the child. "Why, what is the matter?" she asked, her eyes big with anxiety. A child in distress was a very terrible thing to the lady, late of the chair.

Then she, too, recognised Imelda. "Why," she said, "you are the little girl who smiled back at me last time. You weren't in the procession to-day. I looked out for you."

Imelda forgot, as the other had evidently forgotten, that it is not right to talk in church. "I was there," she said, "with my sisters, among the big ones." "Ah," the lady said, "I saw them; but can you tell me who the little boy was who was walking between them—a darling little boy in a white tunic, with thick golden hair? He smiled at me, just like you did last time, and he turned round and still smiled after he had passed."

"I never saw him," Imelda said, "but I had promised our Lady not to look up, and I didn't—not once, but"—and there and then she came out with the whole story, how she had been desperately

interested in the chair because of its occupant being carried about like Our Lord, and how she had looked up, and how Theresa had said that the little Christ could see without looking up, and how she had prayed to be exactly like Him when she passed the chair. She poured out the whole story, snuggled against the lady's side. God had indeed given her a comforter.

When she came to the part where she had suddenly stood still and Thereasa had given her a push she felt the arm which had stolen round her tremble, and the lady gave a little gasp. As a matter of fact she was recalling the little boy whom she had seen. He had stood still suddenly as He smiled at her, and then He had gone forward quickly.

"You were praying then," she said, "when you passed me ?"

"Yes," Imelda answered. "I was praying to be 'xactly like little Jesus, so (with admirable candour) I might see you without looking up."

The lady loved the human touch. She laughed, there in church ! the soft Sanctus-bell laugh, but she was very, very serious.

"Do you know," she told Imelda, "that a wonderful *wonderful* thing has happened. I have walked here from my chair, and I haven't walked for eighteen months ! The doctors said that I should never walk again. I had told my nurse to fetch me in an hour's time, but I think I shall walk home."

"Oh," Imelda cried, looking at the radiant face, "Our Lady must have cured you! Or—perhaps" —the inspiration came to her—"the little boy that you saw was Our Lord, only (crestfallenly) He wouldn't have looked about, or smiled back."

"I don't know about that," the lady said, "but we will talk about it when you come to see me."

And that was how Imelda found her way into the little Kingdom of Heaven.

THE BOOK OF BROTHER DONATUS

THE original fair copy of the renowned *Maxims of Brother Donatus* is still preserved in the library of the ancient Abbey of Holy Cross. It contains the quaint illustrations of his contemporary, Brother Adrian, with the picture of a dead sparrow lying in the snow as its frontispiece. Every literary person, let alone every educated Catholic, is familiar of course with the *Maxims*. It is not so generally known, however, that these once formed the third section of a work on the three mystical stages, which is the reason why the MS. bears the curious title of *Union with God*. This title, as well as the irrelevant illustration—representing, for the most part, flowers and animals and children (or is it elves?)—was bestowed on it by Brother Adrian, and thereby hangs a tale which it would seem might be included in this collection, for there are some who will have it that Brother Adrian was a mystic as well as Brother Donatus.

* * * * * * *

Brother Adrian was engaged in sweeping the corridor. When he reached the cell of Brother

Donatus he stooped and took off his sandals, not because this was holy ground, although Brother Adrian would have been the last to dispute such a suggestion, but because his sandals happened to squeak, and the sound of squeaking sandals had a disastrous effect on the nerves of Brother Donatus, who was busy in his cell completing his treatise on *Illumination*. Time was when Brother Adrian would have deliberately rattled his broom against the wainscot in order to apprise Brother Donatus of his vicinity, but that was in the days when Brother Donatus was Guest-master and sat in the cell next the guest-parlour holding himself in readiness to interview the visitors who abounded at the Abbey, which was famous for its hospitality. When Brother Adrian had the task of sweeping the corridors laid on him by a vindictive and non-comprehending Novice-master, and had to lay aside his palette and pencils for an implement he loathed, he would make a great noise with the latter outside the cell where the Guest-master sat occupying his free intervals with setting down his stray thoughts on his tablets, and Brother Donatus would emerge and invite the young novice to come in and talk to him for a moment, for Brother Adrian had been his pupil in the school attached to the monastry. There Brother Adrian would pour out the woes of his artist soul, for Nature had ordained him to wield a brush of other sorts than that which had summoned the

Guest-master from his meditations, and grace was only more or less successful in its substitution of the besom for the camel-hair. Brother Donatus would sit there, with the tablets that held his vagrant musings laid aside, and listen to the other's grievance until some preposterous visitor came to interrupt. But Brother Adrian would have got the grievance off his chest to a safe confidant, and the unfeeling Novice-master might continue to inflict his brutalities on a sufficiently amenable subject. The young novice contracted an immense veneration for Brother Donatus, as did all the people who came in contact with the gentle, kindly-mannered Guest-master. Foremost among these were Robin and Dickon. Robin was the youngest of the alumni in the school attached to the Abbey. He was but six years old, and possessed privileges in accordance with his tender years. Inseparable from him was the big, shaggy, sheep dog, Dickon, who spent all his leisure—and he was a respect-worthy animal who possessed working hours—with the child whom he adored. Dickon was also a prime favourite with Brother Donatus, who was immensely friendly with the brute creation. When the Guest-master gave Robin a rough ride to somewhere on his knee, Dickon would stand by, looking on, and quite entering into the spirit of the thing. Both Robin and Dickon possessed the highest opinion of the Guest-master.

Then there came the new arrangement. The Prior chanced to discover that the things which Brother Donatus scribbled down in his odd moments possessed considerable literary merit, besides being deeply tinged with mysticism. The Prior was not a literary man, much less a mystic; they had made him Superior because he was eminently a man of affairs, and as shrewd as a needle in judging human nature—the book most suited, after all, for the perusal of a Superior. Being a practical man, however, he willingly accepted the suggestion that Brother Donatus possesed a gift which was being sadly wasted, and took tentative action at once. Brother Donatus received directions to sit in the Scriptorium, at the far end, near the door, and write (when not otherwise occupied) something as a part of his purgation—a species of mortification.

So the book of Brother Donatus was duly begun under holy obedience. It was to treat of the three mystical stages. He arranged his ideas and set them down, and the good Prior perused them and had a feeling that in all probability they were very good.

It was a blow to Brother Adrian not to be able to seek Brother Donatus at all hours and pour out his woes, but he found solace in the fact that from his position in the Scriptorium (when he was permitted to use his pen and paints) he could watch Brother Donatus at work, with, as Brother

Adrian felt sure, the inspiration pouring into his soul.

Many others, too, were beginning to realise the holiness of Brother Donatus. The old, dour Ostiarius, Brother Jerome, still fetched the Guest-master out to parlour, but it was only to interview assorted visitors, whom he admitted with increasing discretion. Brother Donatus accepted these interruptions, for he recognised them as such nowadays, as part of his purgation—a species of mortification, like the continual fidget of having the adoring sheep's eyes of Brother Adrian fixed on him every time that he chanced to look up from his work. The ideas which had overflowed in the Guest-master's cell came less easily in the Scriptorium, and the assorted visitors noticed a wan and harassed look on the patient face of their host, and many curious tales (more curious often to the narrator than to the listener) withered on the lips of the complainant faced by the far-away look in the eyes of the long-suffering Guest-master. The rumour went abroad that Brother Donatus was a man of extraordinary spirituality, and the visitors readily believed it.

Purgation, the first volume of Brother Donatus' work, got finished under these auspices. The Prior perused it and rubbed the shining top of his shaven head. The pages submitted to him by the brother with a mystical trend were something outside the scope of his spiritualities. They might or they

might not be the work of genius. He would have to show them to the Father Provincial, but meanwhile, practical man that he was, he was not going to rob the Abbey of its chance of producing a rival to the vaunted Thomas of Aquin, or to the monk Thomas of Kempen, of whom the Augustinians were so egregiously proud. He readily assented to the very humble request of Brother Donatus that he might pursue his work in the solitude of his cell. He relieved him of his post as Guest-master so that the complete detachment from creatures for which Brother Donatus craved might be procured. *Illumination* was to give the great message of God's dimensions, of His infinity—His length and breadth and depth and height. This could not be achieved with the tales of the world ringing in the ears of the "transcriber," or with the adoring eyes of Brother Adrian fixed on him in sensual expectation of a supernatural thrill. All this arranged, Brother Donatus set about detaching himself from the world of created things with unexampled severity. He seldom appeared at recreation time, for the Prior had dispensed him from the obligation of taking his recreation in common. Brother Adrian, who was now professed, sadly missed this opportunity of submitting his sketches to the Brother who had quite a tolerable eye for colour. Even when Brother Donatus did appear, he wore so abstracted an air that the idle advances of his companions were repelled—

the tittle-tattle of the community-room no longer reached his ear, and the pictorial fancies of Brother Adrian remained forlornly in the folds of the latter's ample sleeve. The young monk consoled himself by making elaborate drawings for the decorating of the fair copy of *Purgation*. Death, Judgement, and Hell were represented in these with a rather sour fidelity —Brother Adrian possessed the touch of a realist as well as the temper of an artist!

The advance in holiness on the part of Brother Donatus made nowhere a greater impression than on Robin and also, I might add, on his dog, Dickon. Nowadays, when the pair happened to encounter Brother Donatus, on his way to the chapel, Robin would glance furtively at the preoccupied face of his quondam playfellow, and Dickon would carry his tail sedately and remain demurely at Robin's side. Robin and Dickon had got into trouble with Brother Adrian for their noisy play outside the chapel, inasmuch as shouting disturbed Brother Donatus at his prayers. Brother Adrian had divined this in the same way that he had divined the torture of the squeaking sandals, for the holy monk was the last one to lodge complaints.

So Brother Adrian doffed his foot-gear, and Robin and Dickon mitigated the exuberance of their frolics, and the book of Brother Donatus progressed—yet less satisfactorily than might have been expected. The author prayed for interior light. He fasted and

kept vigil until his body became worn to a shadow, and the sound of the human voice and the creak of the conventual sandal became intensified to a degree that strained the frayed nerves of the brother to snapping-point. No instrumnt of penance invented by himself could have proved half so efficacious. Yet the book limped and halted. Profound, scholarly, mystical, it yet lacked that very quality which its intended title bespoke—illumination. The author was bitterly conscious of the thing lacking. He spent hours in church praying for light—for a direct message from God that should illumine the hearts of men. He wished to convey to them the size, the immensity of God—to show men "God's dimensions" —but expression eluded him. He set it down, like the holy man that he was, to his own spiritual shortcomings, and increased his austerities accordingly. It was the mere shadow of a man that Robin met walking across the extern cloister garth one morning when he and Dickon were pursuing their way towards the Infirmary to solicit the kind offices of the Brother Infirmarian for the latter. The child and the dog were walking as slowly and decorously as the holy man himself, for a sad misfortune had overtaken Dickon, and he was limping painfully on three legs. There had been an encounter with the taverner's bulldog, and Dickon had come badly to grief. There was a wound in one of his front paws that steadily refused to heal, for all the lavings and

bandaging that had been bestowed on it. Robin was overcome with grief on his companion's behalf. He said prayers to the best of his abilities, which were not large, that Dickon might go on four legs again, for a shepherd has no use for a dog that goes on three legs—even a sheep would flout such an animal —and Robin remembered the passing of old Roger, Dickon's predecessor. There had been no pension for old Roger.

Robin looked at the holy man and greatly longed to tell him of the peril in which his favourite stood, but Brother Donatus was absorbed in thought. He seemed unconscious of the presence of the pair as they passed by, albeit that it was at the sober pace necessitated by the condition of Dickon's paw.

A couple of days later the same thing occurred—with a difference. This time Robin was alone. Dickon's paw had become horribly worse. He had been lying on the shepherd's hearth, for the snow lay on the ground outside, and when Robin had invited him to come for a walk on his three available legs he had simply lifted his shaggy head, and looking wistfully at his best-beloved human being, had wagged his tail feebly and apologetically, and dropped his nose back on to the ground with a heavy, doggy sigh.

Robin watched Brother Donatus walking slowly across the cloister garth. The holy man was more preoccupied than ever. He never so much as noticed

the small boy with the tears in his eyes. If only he could get Brother Donatus to say a prayer for Dickon, Robin thought, even now he might be made to go on four legs again. He stood in enormous awe of the monk on whose knee he had—oh, fearsome thought!—so often enjoyed a rough ride to somewhere; but the case was desperate. Dickon's days were numbered unless God did something; only God was so far off. They said this Holy Brother had learned to get nearer to Him than anyone else in the monastery—so near that he was going to write a book called *Union with God*. Robin wished he could get close up to God, just for once, so that he might tell Him about Dickon. He was shy of asking Brother Donatus because he was so holy — he probably didn't take any count of dogs nowadays ; but hadn't they told him that God watched the sparrows fall ? If only he could attract God's attention He might listen about Dickon, perhaps He was not quite so holy as Brother Donatus ! As the latter approached, Robin summoned up all his courage and addressed him. " Will you please pray for Dickon ? " he said, plucking diffidently at the sleeve of the erstwhile Guest-master—" that he may run on four legs again and look after the sheep."

Brother Donatus turned his eyes vaguely on the small suppliant. He laid his hand abstractedly on his curly head. " Yes, my child, yes," he made reply, and murmured a blessing; but Robin, with his

shrewd child's instinct, was not satisfied. He was certain that the holy man had been too holy to hear what he had said. He went off sadly. He must do his own praying, that was clear.

As for Brother Donatus, he was more preoccupied than ever that morning. He had wrestled all night in prayer, and the feeling was on him that at last God was about to answer him—to show him the hidden sin that obstructed the light that was to illuminate the concluding pages of the book which lay unfinished on his desk awaiting the final inspiration that was to give life to the foregoing pages. He had a promonition that the answer was coming—that he was at last about to learn "God's dimensions"; and that once learned, how gladly would he do life-long penance for the secret sin which had kept out the illuminating radiance—the light which was also life.

He made his way to the chapel with bent head and clasped hands. There he threw himself on his knees and fell into a state of prayer that brought every fibre of his ill-used nervous system into tense activity. He prayed that God would reveal Himself in His true dimensions—in His breadth and height; that men might learn to know and love Him, though that revelation might disclose his own unutterable sin in all its immensity and horror. It was a big prayer.

The silence of the chapel became intensified. The very angels in the sanctuary appeared to be holding

their breath and listening for the answer. Then, as Brother Donatus knelt with dim, unseeing eyes, and fiercely interlaced hands, the silence was broken. From outside there came the shrill note of a child's voice calling a name in a child's insistent way. It smote like a lash across every nerve in the body of the praying man. The agony of it ran through his veins. The cry was repeated. The child was speaking to somebody, shouting out something about his dog. The shrill, reiterated call smote like hammer-blows on the brain of Brother Donatus. He could have screamed with the physical anguish of it. And it was at that moment that the mystical experience recounted in the narrative of Brother Adrian in his Life of Brother Donatus took place. Brother Adrian was no mystic—experimentally, that is—and his description of what actually occurred is vague and incoherent, and tallies with none of the mystical experiences recorded by the saints. Brother Donatus had been through all these. He had struggled with doubts as to the very existence of God, and had experienced the desolation in which a soul believes itself to have been abandoned by God. The feeling that God had turned away, and would not listen had been one of the forms of trial that had come to him many times, but the strange and terrible thing that entered his soul now, at this moment, with an awful suddenness, taking him unawares, was not that God would not, but that He could not listen.

His prayer was unheard, not because God had no existence—with that thesis Brother Donatus could grapple recognising its diabolical origin, but because He possessed an existence which was subject to limitations. *He was not listening now because He was otherwise occupied.* The Infinite One had become in some way the creature of circumstance. The unmeasured, the unencompassed Being with whose infinitely extended dimensions Brother Donatus had been occupied through months of prayer and fasting was at that moment devoid of His attribute of omnipresence. And the horror of the thing lay in the fact that in it Brother Donatus recognised no diabolic suggestion. He accepted it without question as a divine revelation—or confession! He remained on his knees, his whole being dried up—swallowed in the abyss. . . . . Then he rose to his feet and felt his way out of the chapel. Outside he caught sight of Robin, and in the way that trifles have of intruding themselves at gigantic moments, he remembered that he had promised the boy to say a prayer for his dog. He remembered the animal had had its front leg crushed. The child was standing in the middle of the garth looking at something that lay on the ground at his feet on the thin sprinkling of snow. He glanced up at the monk as the latter approached. "Have you been talking to God?" he asked. There was a flushed, eager look on his face, and he had lost his shyness.

"Yes, but God didn't hear," the holy man answered, propounding the amazing heresy without a conscious qualm—only with an indescribable sorrow in his tone.

Robin was not in the least shocked, or even surprised. "No," he said. "He wouldn't. He was out here watching the sparrow fall." He pointed to a little dark patch on the snow. It was a poor little pathetic bundle of feathers, a dead sparrow, perished of cold and hunger. "I knew He'd be watching it," Robin said, "because Jesus Christ says that God watches the sparrows fall, so I called out to Him to make Dickon run on four legs again. I knew. He was there, you see, and watching."

Brother Donatus was silent. There was sounding in his ears the echo of that sharp reiterated cry that had racked his body in every nerve. He caught the name in the echo. Robin had not been calling to a playfellow. "God! God!"—he heard the shrill child's voice in his ears. And he recalled, too, the rest: "Make Dickon run on four legs, please—God! God!"

And it was at that moment that the great answer had come to his prayer—for he had indeed been answered. He had learned his lesson.

He stooped down and picked up the little lifeless body, scarcely heavier than its feather covering, and at the sight of it so great a sorrow overwhelmed the

soul of Brother Donatus that he seemed to forget everything else in the contemplation of the tragedy in which all the tragedies of life and death appeared at that moment to be encompassed. His heart was wrung with a pang of pity that pierced it through and through.

Then the boy suddenly gave another shout—a shrill cry of delight this time. Brother Donatus turned from the contemplation of the pitiful little symbol of helpless suffering, with its closed eyes and drooping head. The child had been joined by his dog, and the pair were rolling together in the snow, locked in a tight embrace.

Brother Donatus looked beyond them. In the snow, from the door of the shepherd's hut, through the open gate, there was the track of canine foot-prints, the firm, even impression of four feet. Robin's prayer had been answered: Dickon was running on four legs.

Up in the dortor Brother Adrian was looking after the wants of crusty old Brother Jerome, who was sick. He looked out of the window at the end of the ward where he was standing and called to the other. "See, Brother! There is Brother Donatus out yonder, and surely he is in ecstasy. for he is lifted right up off his feet. He has surely seen a holy vision!"

Brother Jerome looked out of the window at his end of the dortor. It commanded a different aspect.

"He hath seen the child playing with his dog," he retorted drily. "Call you that a holy vision?"

"I thought he was in ecstasy," Brother Adrian answered, deeply disappointed, "for his face was shining with the joy of it—like light itself. 'Tis passing strange."

That same evening the Prior met Brother Donatus returning from the chapel. There was a curious light glinting in his eyes. The Prior scrutinised him keenly. He had seen a smilar light in the human eye before—there had been brothers who had gone off their heads in the Abbey, and Brother Donatus had been working his brain to the snapping-point. His austerities had been severe too. Neurosis had not, indeed, been invented in those days, but the shrewd Prior knew in which way madness lies. The look on the Brother's face however was of pure joy.

"Well, Brother," his Superior said, "hast thou been saying a Te Deum?"

"Yea, verily," Brother Donatus replied. His hands were clasped and the strange light shot out of his eyes.

"Ah, thou hast been making thanksgiving that *Illumination* is at length completed?" the Prior suggested.

"Nay," Brother Donatus replied, "it is for this—that Dickon, the sheep dog, runs once again on four legs."

The Prior pulled his lips together. It was as he

suspected. The only question was, had Brother Donatus overstrained his intellect in the perusal of his task, or had his wits been out of joint all along? It was disappointing, for he had hoped for great things from the book of Brother Donatus.

He sent for the MS. of *Illumination* and turned the leaves over, wondering if its "mystical trend" were but the outcome of a deranged mind. Then he came on a loose scrap of paper on which Brother Donatus had scribbled a rough note. It ran as follows:—"He surely hath failed to apprehend the comprehensiveness of God, nor hath he compassed Him in all His aspects and dimensions who hath not realised that Almighty God not only created the kitten but also taught it to play with its tail."

That settled the matter for the Prior. He was a man of infinite tact and resource and real kindliness of heart. He could still find a place for the afflicted Brother so that he should not realise his infirmity. Old Brother Jerome, the Ostiarius, was past work; Brother Donatus could take his place and still imagine himself Guest-master although another held that position.

So Brother Donatus retired from his literary work to take up the post of Door-keeper. He delighted in his new task, thanking the Prior with tears in his eyes for the privelege. The only one who lamented the change was Brother Adrian, for he was illuminating the book, and the non-appearance of the third

volume would surely spoil the whole. The third volume indeed never got written, and the way in which Brother Adrian overcame the difficulty is typical of the naïve age in which he lived. He made a careful collection of all the quaint and wise sayings of the Brother door-keeper, made either to himself or in his hearing to those who came to the grille—or to Robin, it might be, for some of the most renowned of the "Maxims" are simple enough to have been addressed to a child—and these he made into a book to which he gave the fortuitous title of *Union with God*. And so the book of Brother Donatus got completed; and in the course of time it was read, and the whole highly approved of, by the Father Provincial, who was a man of deep learning and piety, and a mighty theologian. But of the three volumes one only has come down to posterity, and that is the one which is known as *The Maxims of Brother Donatus*, but to which Brother Adrian (who painted the artless picture of a dead sparrow on its frontispiece) gave the title of *Union with God*.

THE CONVERSION OF OLD NURSE

Ronald Elwin sat up suddenly in bed.

"Nurse!" he cried, and a dainty white-capped lady with the red cross on her apron front stepped forward. The dying man turned his eyes on her. "No," he said, "not you, I want Nurse. My head is bad. She'll sit on my chair and I'll lie on the hearthrug with my head in her lap—she'll stroke it—that does it good. Ah, God!"

"It's his old nurse," the sister explained to the attendant doctor. "He told me about her. She was a sort of mother to him. Poor fellow!"

As he lay there the Roman Catholic chaplain passed through the ward. He had been administering the last sacraments to one of his flock. He looked across sympathetically at the unconscious man, breathing away his last moments on earth, alive, yet not alive. He knew him well—a dear, charming fellow. He remembered something he had said once: "I expect your religion is well worth studying."

"Then why not study it?" had been the quick response. A shrug of the shoulders. "I'm such a lazy chap. I never could study. Old Nurse used to do my sums for me when I was a tiny kid—an awful swot it must have been for her, poor old dear!" "But no one can study religion for you," the padre had answered—"not even old Nurse!" He remembered it so well. Poor Elwin! He had got struck down in his first engagement. There had been none of the tedious discipline of the trenches for him. It consoled the priest to think that he would carry before the judgment seat of God the plea that he had died for his country.

A few hours later the sick man opened his eyes, "Thanks, Nurse!" he said, and then closed them again for ever.

* * * * * * *

Miss Hannah Finnigan occupied a room in a poor district on the outskirts of London. She was an elderly lady, and she enjoyed the old-age pension, plus an equal sum kindly added by her late employer, Colonel Elwin, to whose children she had acted as nurse for very many years. While Ronald was in England her resources had been augmented by an occasional gift. Ronald kept up with his old nurse and came to see her periodically. They were great pals, to use his own expression. Sometimes he would bring a bird, or a pound of tea, or, it might be—we will be quite frank—a bottle

of Irish whiskey. Hannah Finnigan had been retired from active service in Colonel Elwin's family when Ronny was a biggish schoolboy, on the occasion of the Colonel's second marriage, the new Mrs Elwin disapproving of Hannah's position and influence with her step-family. "A common, ignorant woman," she termed her, and the description was perfectly accurate. Hannah Finnigan was of unnecessarily humble origin, even for a nurse, who may, and should be, quite a superior person, nor was she of the order of intelligence that improves on a poor education. The Colonel's late lady had been a gay, butterfly-like person, and she had deliberately chosen Hannah as a nurse for her babies for the reason that she was not likely to feed them up with religion. The Colonel himself had suffered from a Calvinistic nurse in his childhood, and, being a kindly and humane man, he concurred in the selection of Hannah, whose character, admirable in all other respects, contained the item that Hannah Finnigan did not take as kindly as she should do to church-going. The Colonel's lady absorbed this piece of information, and hastily secured Hannah Finnigan, in spite of her homeliness of mind and person.

Hannah became established in the family, and on the death of Mrs Elwin brought up the motherless boys and girls, pouring on them all the devotion of her warm Irish heart. But Ronny was her favourite. Lazy, loving Ronny-boy, with a strain

of " naughtiness " in him that responded to the part of Hannah that had, or should have, gone against her in her character. Ronny loved fairy tales, and Hannah loved telling them. Harold—austere, industrious Harold—who had later gone into the Anglican ministry and become a Canon at five-and thirty, had held, from the age of five, that fairy tales were untrue, but Ronny had wistfully hoped that things might happen like fairy tales, and so did Nurse. They were great friends and confidants—Nurse and Ronald.

It was the coming of the second Mrs Elwin that upset Hannah's reign. The new mother was frankly shocked at the theological attitude of the person placed in charge of the tender and receptive minds of her step-children. Born of a mother hailing from the south of Ireland, who retained, though married to a Protestant husband, and lapsed from her own religion, many memories of her youth, Hannah had acquired a curious medley of folk-lore and other things among which her imagination ran riot. Angels and fairies were on an equal footing to her. The new Mrs Elwin was horrified to find Hannah moulding the sensitive minds of her charges with such medleys as the legend of the fairy changeling, and of the infants who escaped this fate by being born at midnight on Christmas Eve. Banshees and saints, mercifully not biblical saints, were mentioned in the same breath. Hannah was obviously a totally

unfit person to be in contact with young people. So the Colonel was persuaded to "retire her." It was Ronny—lazy Ronny, forsooth!—who raised a revolt against the sentence on old Nurse but the new Mrs Elwin had her way, and Ronny was sent to bed, and old Nurse retired into private life with ten shillings a week, and the promise of needlework to augment her income.

It nearly broke old Nurse's heart to leave the children, but most of all Ronny. But Ronny didn't forget her. He was her boy still. He came to see her in the holidays, and when he had one of his headaches he would still lie on her shabby hearthrug and let her stroke his head as it lay in her lap. He would tell her stories of the laughable and diverting things that sometimes occurred during school chapel. Hannah knew that it was her omission to correct Ronny when he did these indecorous things that had made her an unsuitable person to be with the young, but she listened, and smiled guiltily at Ronny's story of the Dean tipping his chair backward during the Bishop's long sermon, and suddenly going head over heels. Nurse, in her dreadful pagan way, sympathised with Ronny's boredom.

"It's just all so stiff," she agreed, "church is. Yet I've heard my mother say as how she used to love church better than anything in the world when she was a girl." There was a wistful look when

Hannah said this. "Perhaps," she added "there are churches somewhere that are nice. I'd like to find one of 'em, Ronny-boy, that I would, but I never have."

It was obviously not the way to talk to a child already addicted to taking live stag-beetles to church to exercise during prayer-time. The second Mrs Elwin was certainly justified in her action.

Then Ronald went to Sandhurst.

" Nurse, you old sinner," he said to her one day, " don't you ever go to church?"

" I go sometimes, Ronny," Hannah replied. (It was one of the new Mrs Elwin's grievances that she addressed her " children " without a respectful prefix.) " But I don't make head nor tail of it."

"You disreputable old woman!" Ronald answered, " no wonder my revered step-mother gave you the boot."

Hannah never saw a joke—that was why Ronald delighted to chaff her.

" My mother loved her religion," she mused, "till she got with father. I daresay it's all right somewhere," she sighed wistfully.

" Now," Ronny went on, in the same vein, " if only you were pious, Nurse, you could go to church for me—like you used to do my sums. How I used to sweat you, selfish little devil that I was! But I believe you're right, Nursey. It's all right somewhere, only we haven't got hold of it. (He had changed his tone.) I believe we were nearest to

it when you told me the fairy tales of the bog-folk and their little people. Do you remember the changelings, and the song about the Christ-child protecting the babies born on Christmas night?

"Oh, the starry skies of blue!
Oh, the midnight skies of blue!
Mary Queen will guard my baby,
Christ was born at midnight, too!"*

He sang it softly. "At any rate," he said, "that had more of the supernatural in it than our catechism at school. We got up against God—we did, really—I expect it's all to be found somewhere, and if I wasn't a lazy devil I'd hunt it out—it's probably the only thing worth knowing." He was intensely serious now, so of course old Nurse began to smile and look for the joke. Old dear! She was so non-understanding, up to a certain point, and after that all-understanding from the instinct that is sometimes accorded to common and ignorant people who greatly love.

Then she gave up looking for the joke and understood.

Soon after the War began Ronald's regiment was ordered to the front, and a terrible season of suspence started for poor Hannah. The news came early in December. The clergyman of the parish in which Hannah lived was a kind old man. He had heard

*The refrain of a poem in the *Ave Maria*.

from Hannah that she had been nurse in Colonel Elwin's family, and when he saw Ronald's death recorded in the casualty lists he called on Miss Finnigan purposely to offer his condolences—a very understanding act of Christian courtesy, by the way. He did his best to comfort the stricken woman, who had been a mother to the motherless boy. He tried texts. He always found them efficacious in these cases.

"He is not dead," he reminded Hannah, gently, "but sleeping."

But old Nurse shook her head. "He never was one for sleep," she said, with conviction. "He would wake up at five in the morning when he was a little chap sleeping in my room, and then there was no peace till I let him get up. No, sir, he wouldn't be sleeping."

The old parson tried another text. "You must remember," he said, "the words, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord for they shall rest from their labours.'"

But Hannah's grief was unsolaced. "He never laboured," she answered. "Master Ronny was always one to amuse himself—bless him!—he's got no labours to rest from. He just had a good time, thank the Lord!"

The old clergyman was a tiny bit horrified. Miss Finnigan was not the usual type of defiant heathen, frequent enough to be met with. He was somewhat

at a loss how to treat her. "Well, he's having a very blessed time now in Heaven, with the saints," he observed, ignoring the previous slumbrous hypothesis. But Miss Finnigan shook her head for a second time.

"Ronny had his faults," she said. "He was no saint, bless him! There are many things he had to learn. 'You'll learn all about that, Ronny,' I used to say to him, 'when you've had your bit o' trouble' but he never had his bit o' trouble——"

"I expect you fenced him off from it," the pastor observed shrewdly, and Hannah liked him for that comment.

"I always helped him out of his scrapes," she answered, warming towards her would-be comforter. "Oh, sir, if only I could help him still! He seems so gone from me when I can't help him. When he was there, fighting, I was able to make him socks and the like. Madam, Mrs Elwin that is, wrote to me when she heard, that knitted belts was wrong, 'cause they harboured the creatures, but I didn't mind. I'd worked for him, God bless him!—and I know he wouldn't clean his horse down with the socks his old Nurse sent him. But now I can't do nothing to help him—my boy, my Ronny!"

The old parson left her to have her cry out, after telling her of the Memorial Service that was to be held in Ronald's honour in the fashionable church attended by his family.

Old Nurse went to the Memorial Service. There was beautiful music, and an address in which Ronny's virtues were recounted—his courtesy in thanking his nurse with his last breath was alluded to. "Thanks, Nurse," had been his last words. It was a beautiful address, full of allusion to the grief of the survivors that usually appeals to the bereaved. It failed to comfort old Nurse. She was not thinking of herself, she was thinking of Ronny. Ronny must be wanting her help, or he would no longer be Ronny—an annihilating thought! She had always been able to help Ronny. Even when he was in India she had looked after Vic, his ancient terrier, just as she had taken over his surreptitious pets after the holidays when he was a school-boy, Vic, released from his infirmities, slept (one might apply the term to him, poor brute!) in her back garden, buried with her own hands. Distance had never cut Ronald off from his old Nurse. There was a hymn at the end of the service beginning with the words, "Who are these like stars appearing?" but poor old Nurse was convinced that, whoever they were, Ronny wasn't among them, appearing like a star in a dazzling white robe. It carried no conviction to her sore heart, albeit that Ronny was a hero who had died for his country. The poor take sacrifice more as a matter of course than do the rich. To Hannah it seemed that dying for one's country couldn't change careless, faulty, happy-go-lucky

Ronny into a starry being like those alluded to in the hymn. Old Nurse left the chruch with the old wistful feeling that something was to be found somewhere. Ronald had felt like that, too. Church had always been a disappointment to him. In his heart he expected something from church. On her way home she passed an open door. It led into another kind of church to that which Nurse had just left. A little stuffy building it was. Old Nurse turned in to have a look round, and a rest. It was a curious place. She guessed shrewdly from the number of painted idols about that it was a papistical place of worship. Inside the door, just over a basin of very soiled water, were pinned a number of black-edged cards, with curling corners, some of them yellow with age, others quite new. One of the latter caught Hannah's eye. Printed at the top were the words, "Jesu, mercy!" and below, in large type visible to Hannah's eyes, unspectacled as she was, the words: "Of your charity pray for the soul of Michael Leary, of the——Fusiliers, who was killed in action, November, the——, 1914." Then there followed a series of sentences printed in small type. Old Nurse had her spectacles in her pocket. She got them out and proceeded to read the small print. It didn't get her much for'arder, but it made her exceedingly curious. There were printed a succession of ejaculations and short prayers, and under each was the cryptic statement —"100 *days ind.*"

Hannah, with swift instinct, connected these mystic phrases with the soul of Michael Leary, who was, in charity, to be prayed for. He was a soldier, like her boy. Why could not her boy Ronny be prayed for likewise, and this spell uttered over him? Of course, the words formed some sort of spell.

A smallish boy appeared on the scene at that moment.

Somehow he reminded her of Ronald in his youth. "Sonny," she said, beckoning to him, "can you tell me what that means?"

The boy was in the act of putting on his cap. He removed it again, and scratched his head. This was a facer! Perhaps he was not the first Catholic to be embarrassed by a request from an outsider to explain the doctrine of Indulgences off-hand. He formulated his answer in his mind—he was a very intelligent little boy. "It means," he said, "that he's (indicating Michael Leary) dead, and you says them prayers for him to get 'is soul 'light and refreshment.'"

"And what might fifty days ind. mean?" the inquirer asked.

The smallish boy began to grow hot. He had a vague recollection of an instruction in which a warning had been given against a wrong explanation. Being an intelligent lad he grappled the point admirably. "It means," he said valiantly, "that if you pray them prayers for 'im (he made a smudge

with his finger on the name of Michael Leary) you do 'im as much good as if he 'ad behaved extra well for a hundred days, maybe."

He was, I think, justifiably pleased with himself and took heart to enlarge on the subject. "You see," he said, "the dead can't help theirselves, so we has to help them instead. The dead is as 'elpless as babies, so we 'as to 'elp them by praying for them—see?"

"As helpless as babies, so we have to help them." Old Nurse listened to the words as though to exquisite music.

"And could you help him if you said those prayers?" she asked of her informer.

"Why yes," was the answer. "I knows 'em all by heart, too."

Old Nurse deliberated. "Could you say them for anyone?" she further inquired.

The smallish boy was no bigot. "Yes," he answered. "Anyone dead." His theology was excellent, on the whole.

"Could you," old Nurse said, after a moment or two,—"could you say 'em every day for a week for someone called Ronald if I were to give you a penny for doing it?"

The nod was quite emphatic, and forthwith the bargain was made. Walter Stanislaus Filson, which he told her was his name, in full, agreed to say the indulgenced prayers every day for a week, at the

end of which time Miss Finnigan would meet him at the church door and pay him the sum of one penny.

Old Nurse left the stuffy little sanctuary in a state of guilty triumph. She had done something for her boy. She felt sure it was something naughty —this dealings with charms and magic words—yet it was a wonderful comfort, and perhaps God would not be so hard on her as the second Mrs Elwin. At the end of the week she paid Walter Stanislaus his stipend, and they entered upon a permanent arrangement.

Old Nurse would go and sit sometimes in the church where Ronny was being prayed for. She felt a queer sort of interest in it, and wondered what all the strange things meant. At the end of a month, however, the contract with Walter Stanislaus was brought to a close. The latter possessed a remarkably tender conscience. One day he was overtaken by a scruple. His teacher happened to be giving a lesson on the Reformation, and mentioned that the charge of having told people that an indulgence could be bought with money had been brought by the "reformers" against the Pope. Walter Stanislaus became filled with vague apprehensions as to the legitimacy of his weekly penny. The sin of simony loomed large before him. Like a sensible lad he carried his scruple to the priest in the confessional. "A lady had given him a penny to

say indulgenced prayers for her. Had he been wicked when he took it?"

The priest smiled to himself behind the perforated screen. He did not enter into the theology of the case—Mass stipends, alms given to a convent in support of a praying Sister, etc. He simply said: "Well, if I were you, I'd tell the old lady to put her penny in the purgatory box, and if she wants to know what that means, she had better come and ask me; and don't worry, you've done no harm."

So Walter Stanislaus forewent his stipend, and told old Nurse what the priest had said, and the episode ended.

But old Nurse was not to be baulked so easily. A precious opportunity of helping Ronny was not to be given up lightly. A great idea occurred to her one day when she happened to be passing a stationer's shop. In the window was a specimen black-edged card, similar to those on the church door. She marched in and purchased a packet, and when the lady-from-the-church called next Miss Finnigan had a favour to ask of her. The lady-from-the-church was an accomplished penwoman. She printed out all the tea-meeting tickets with her own hands! Miss Finnigan asked her if she would be so kind as to print her out something on a card. The lady was more than willing, and Hannah produced her black-edged card.

"What shall I write?" the young lady asked, with the pen poised in the air.

"Write here," Hannah said, indicating the spot, "'Jesu mercy!'"

The young lady looked slightly embarrassed. She was not in the habit of approaching religion so directly. It was like the dissenters. She seldom got nearer the supernatural than a reference to even-song. This was really rather indecent. In Miss Finnigan's parlour on a week-day! She wrote it, however. "Now," Hannah said, "please write under it, 'Of your charity pray for the soul of Ronald Elwin.'"

The young-lady-from-the-church dropped the pen. "But, Miss Finnigan," she cried, "you shouldn't say such things! I can't write that. I'm sure the Vicar wouldn't like it!"

Hannah stood rebuked. She was not surprised to find out that this new comfort was a bit of the depravity that was in her nature, and had been in Ronny's too. The same that had made her unfit to bring up Mrs Elwin's children. She might have known that this way of helping a Ronald who still existed somewhere, very much himself, would be "naughtiness." Ah, well! the thought of surreptitiously putting up a card for Ronny at the door of the Popish church would have to be given up.

But old Nurse hadn't been beaten.

She had taken to attending services at the church where they prayed for the dead men. She didn't

understand anything, but she was conscious of what a wistful outsider, a poet, has called—

> "The strange unearthly passion,
> The mystery of worship."

Hannah was moved by the strange unearthly passion as she knelt before the smoke-dimmed sanctuary and heard the *De Profundis* recited (in the vernacular) for those fallen in action. She had no desire to learn more. She was quite satisfied to peep into the strange country, so like the fairyland of the tales that Ronny had loved. He would have loved this kind of worship. She felt sure he would not have laughed at it nor been bored to wickedness. He would doubtless have called her a "wicked old sinner" for going there, but he would have loved it all the same.

She came to associate church-going with Ronny, on account of the prayers for the soldiers, living and dead. One day it was given out that a plenary indulgence applicable to the souls in Purgatory could be obtained by visiting the church of a certain religious Order in the neighbourhood. The indulgence could be gained on three occasions in the year, of which this was one. Old Nurse pricked up her ears. That sounded simple—visiting a church. She was diffident about reciting prayers, but any heathen could visit a church—she could sit there all day, if need be, to make sure. Still ignorant of the most

elementary truths of Christianity, she had acquired an idea of the meaning of a plenary indulgence. It meant complete refreshment for the soul to whom it was applied. Hannah had salvaged much information on the subject of the holy souls and their condition from the bewildering sea of words that flowed from the pulpit. She knew now that Ronald might require rest from the strenuous labours of purgation. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, for they shall rest from their labours."

The services of Walter Stanislaus were again requisitioned. He was offered the sum of twopence to guide Miss Finnigan to the church where the indulgence was to be gained. Hannah had, to use her expression, gone to pieces since the death of Ronald. She was very slow and feeble nowadays. Walter Stanislaus had no scruples on this occasion, and he conducted her at a brisk pace to a church some distance off. Old Nurse reached her bourn breathless and fagged out. Then Walter Stanislaus put the question to her. "What are you going to do in church?"

"I'm going to gain the indulgence," Hannah replied with shining eyes.

"You can't," Walter Stanislaus replied tersely. "You have to be a Catholic to gain an indulgence. You have to go to Confession and Communion."

"You might have told me that sooner," the poor old soul answered.

She crept into the church to rest her weary old body. Walter Stanislaus regarded his twopence, paid in advance, but I regret to say he had no conscience on this occasion. He had discreetly suppressed his curiosity as to Hannah's intentions until the twopence was earned.

Old Nurse sat quite still, gazing at the lighted altar (there was Exposition) until she felt better. Then she made up her mind what was to be done, Walter had told her on a former occasion that the priest had invited her to go and see him. She got out of her seat. The peace and quietness of the place, where the wonder centred in the White Object that she had been regarding, had refreshed her. She toiled back to the other church, and, knocking at the Presbytery door, asked to see the priest. She was dog-tired, but there was no time to be lost.

"What can I do for you, my friend?" the priest asked.

"I want to be made a Catholic," Hannah said.

The shrewd old cleric scrutinised her.

"Why?" he asked, laconically. There were blankets and bread tickets about and elderly women do not, as a rule, want to be made Catholics so abruptly.

"Because Catholics pray for the dead," Hannah answered, with corresponding crispness.

It was a sufficiently good answer, but the priest still demurred. A sentimental emotion is not lasting

enough to build a confession of faith upon. The priest asked Hannah many questions of a searching nature. Her sincerity impressed him, on the whole. Her disappointment at finding that she could not be received on the spot was intense, but there was a suspicion of now or never about her attitude that again put the priest, with the soup and blankets in his mind, on his guard. As a matter of fact, Hannah when she found that there was no possibility of her becoming a Catholic there and then, was fain to give up the idea of "qualifying" since it would be too late. Then she remembered that the indulgence was to be obtained three times a year. She might become a Catholic in time for the next occasion, which would only be a few months off. So the priest discovered that the inquirer was willing to be instructed. She was still an enigma to him. She appeared to possess no inkling of the religion that she desired to embrace. She had no Catholic friends —nothing to draw her except that the Church prayed for the dead.

At last the Reverend Father referred her to the community of nuns who devoted themselves to the instruction of converts. He warned the Sisters of the suspicion of loaves and fishes in connection with the would-be convert, and instructed them to go very slowly and cautiously with Hannah Finnigan. The nuns were as shrewd as the priest, so it came about that all the chaff of a loaves-and-fishy motive

was to be winnowed from the soul of Hannah by a stern process of religious instruction which would effectively try the gold of her resolution.

Poor Hannah! It was a stiff task indeed. The nuns were kind and patient, but Penny Catechism was unspeakably dreary and hard to the comprehension of Old Nurse, whose intellectual parts were not at all remarkable. Ronny would have called it a "swot," and it was indeed worse than Ronny's sums, but, like the latter, it was being done for Ronny. That was what gave zest to the task. It was something that would help Ronny. Old Nurse went into her undertaking with a whole-hearted desire to succeed. Did the highly intelligent ladies who instructed her realise what it meant to poor old Hannah Finnigan to master the simple answers to the plain questions in the Catechism? I doubt it. The way is not made hard for all slow-witted catechumens, but in Hannah's case it was by much tribulation that she arrived at the desired goal. In time, and with pains *forte* and *dure*, she arrived at a knowledge of the Christian verities that the second Mrs Elwin might well have envied, albeit that it contained some verities that she would not have approved of.

It took Hannah quite a long time to realise that the Catholic faith was not naughtiness, akin to the recitation of charms, and like pagan practices. The nuns, however, showed old Nurse many things apart

from the Penny Catechism. She learned the beauty of holiness—the sweetness and happiness begotten of the true faith. The nuns, in short, introduced her to the "magic of the sanctuary." Old Nurse sought refuge from the brain-racking sentences of men in the knowledge that God, in the hollow of whose hand Ronny lay, was domiciled here on the altar before which his old Nurse knelt, realising the fact that something far more wonderful than a fairy tale was true—ah, how true!

At the end of four months the priest received Hannah into the Church. She chose the day for her First Communion. It was the day on which the indulgence could be gained by visiting the church already mentioned. The nuns did not know why she settled on that particular day. They concluded it would be some anniversary. Hannah was to make her First Communion at the Convent Chapel. It would be a great occasion. The little sanctuary was specially decorated, and there were white flowers on the breakfast-table in the parlour afterwards where a feast was set out in Hannah's honour. How old Nurse longed to share her joy with Ronald! But she would share it! The greatness of the occasion had not served to make Hannah forget the end that was to be served by that once-in-a-lifetime event, her First Communion. Confession and Communion were conditions for gaining the Plenary Indulgence. That very day she would gain it for Ronny. They had

spared Hannah on the subject of indulgences—that might well be explained later, the instructress held, so her knowledge of that point of doctrine was still restricted to what she had already gleaned. What Hannah knew was that she could now gain a plenary indulgence applicable to a soul in Purgatory by visiting the church in question, and praying for the Pope's intentions. That was all she wanted to know.

The joy and excitement of the morning took it out of Hannah. She had become very feeble during the last few months—in fact, the Sisters had urged on the priest the desirability of receiving her without full instruction in case the poor old soul went off suddenly, which was quite a possible contingency.

"Go home now, and go to bed," the Reverend Mother told her. Hannah went home, but not to bed. She had other business on hand. She was feeling dreadfully "queer," so she must get it over in case she got worse.

It was a longish way to the church of the indulgence. Without Walter Stanislaus she was able to take her time, but even then it was a toilsome matter getting there. She sank down on to her knees when she got inside the church. There was Exposition. The joy of the morning was throbbing in her heart. Oh, if only Ronny were there! But Ronny was to be attended to without delay. Five "Our Father's" is a simple condition, yet an "Our Father" takes some saying if you want to be certain

that it's properly done. Old Nurse repeated each clause carefully and conscientiously.

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." She thought of the "new" Mrs Elwin and forgave her for her dismissal, after twenty years. It was necessary for Ronny's sake. The prayer acheived, old Nurse gave a great sigh. She was trying to realise her triumph. She had helped Ronny. He would be sharing her happiness in the peace, light, and refreshment that she had secured for him—she, Hannah, for her own boy Ronny! She dragged herself up from her knees. She was very, very tired. "If you were to die to-day, Granny," one of the nuns had said to her, "you would go straight to Paradise, because it's the day of your First Communion." She longed for rest—sleep—no, not sleep, for then she would not be able to see Ronny enjoying himself. Light, not sleep, not sleep. Was that Ronny asking her to let him put his head against her knees. She sat up straight, and her feeble old hands began to feel about her knees for something. They fell limply on either side. Old Nurse had exhausted her stock of vitality in the orgy of the day—the greatest day of her life.

One of the Fathers at the church had just returned from the front. He noticed the curious attitude of the figure in the corner seat. It was a familiar one—he had been right into the trenches. He called assistance, and they carried the lifeless old body into

the sacristy. There was a prayer book in the dead woman's pocket—a *Garden of the Soul*—"presented to Hannah Finnigan in memory of her First Communion." The date followed—the date of that very day.

The Father from the front read the name, and a memory flashed across his mind. Ronald Elwin had told him that he had an old Nurse living in his old parish—Hannah Finnigan. The name, for some reason, has stuck in his memory. This must be poor Ronald's old Nurse!

"I know the old soul," one of the Fathers said: "the nuns told me about her. She was received the other day. She became a Catholic because she discovered that Catholics pray for the dead, and she had lost a son or somebody in the War. She took a lot of instructing, poor old dear."

The Father from the front was recalling a remark he had made, when young Elwin had laughingly told him that his old Nurse had done his sums for him in the old days. "No one can learn your religion for you, not even old Nurse."

It almost seemed as though old Nurse had tried to!

THE INTERVENER

ONE of the many strange, inexplicable things connected with good people which used to trouble Thérèse when she was a little girl was the lack of good, of decently good manners, displayed by those folk who used to meet one another by arrangement at the Calvary at the foot of the hill leading up to the village. The Calvary at the cross-roads was the traditional trysting-place. Lovers always made their rendezvous there—it would have been considered eccentric to choose any other place—but it worried Thérèse because she noted that those who met at the foot of the Calvary seldom, if ever, had a word to say to Our Lord, let alone going there on purpose to speak to Him. This struck Thérèse as an awful well—solecism! Thérèse didn't belong to the *noblesse*—her father was a farmer—but the nuns had taught her the things which pertain to good-breeding, concerning which they themselves possessed what one might call "privileged information" and to her mind it seemed shockingly bad manners to behave to the Christ in that way. People setting

out on a journey would kneel there and say a prayer it was true, but it was always to the effect that they might meet somebody else safely at the journey's end. No one ever went to see the Christ, or spoke to Him entirely for his own sake. He hung there, with His wistful eyes looking downward, and watched the friends and lovers greet each other and pass along, and Thérèse knew exactly how He felt because of an incident in her own experience. Once she had invited two little friends to spend her name-day with her. The two little friends had also been friends of one another—very great friends—and they lived each a long way out on either side of Thérèse's home. The latter formed a convenient meeting-place, and Thérèse's invitation was accepted. The two little friends came and met, and discussed people and things of which Thérèse possessed no cognisance whilst they ate Thérèse's cake. After they had departed Thérèse came out with one of her odd observations. "My mother," she said, "I think I know how Our Lord feels when people go to the Calvary just to meet each other."

But it was not until the occasion of the picnic that Thérèse actually went to the length of paying the Christ on the Calvary a real courtesy visit on her own account. The picnic was a great affair arranged by the young folk from the mill, under the auspices of the miller himself. The big cart was to be loaded with youngsters and provisions and the party taken

to some distant woods on a nutting expedition. The children were to collect and be picked up at the Calvary. Thérèse was one of those invited, and her excitement was boundless. She possessed a positively terrific capacity for enjoying things. But, alas! when the day arrived there was an emergency at home. It was baking day, and Marie was laid up with one of her headaches. Thérèse could not possibly be spared. The latter stood, with very red eyes, at the gate which commanded a view of the downward trailing road, and watched in the distance the gay little company embark on board the miller's cart. Of course no one had taken any notice of the Christ on the Calvary.

Then it was that the thought came to Thérèse. She would go that very afternoon, all by herself, and pay the Christ a special visit, while the others were enjoying themselves at the picnic. It was a grand idea! It almost compensated for the loss of the day's pleasuring—almost, not quite. So that afternoon, when she was no longer needed, Thérèse slipped out and ran down to the foot of the climbing road, and, kneeling before the Calvary, made the great amend for the bad manners of the picnickers. It was quite thrilling to feel that whilst the others were enjoying themselves she (Thérèse) was devoting herself to Our Lord in His loneliness. But, alas! the thrill did not last long. Thérèse's uncomfortable way of looking at things straight dispelled the

illusion. Something inside her reminded her that, all said and done, it was only because she had been stopped from going to the picnic that she happened to be here. It was accident, not choice. She asked herself, with dreadful outspokenness (or did Our Lord ask it of her?) , would she have been willing to give up the picnic in order to make the amend for the bad manners of the others? Thérèse thought. She peered up at the gentle, searching eyes of the Christ and dropped her own again. Her satisfaction was turned to dust and ashes, and yet—more than ever she longed to give the Christ on the Calvary all that He could desire. All that the lovers and friends who met there gave one another—to make the great amend. It was not what she had expected, but something, something big, had happened inside Thérèse, although her act of courtesy had, so to speak, been a failure, for were not incompleteness and failure the same thing? Thérèse went back to her baking, slowly, for it was up the hill this time, but there was something lifting her up in her heart. It was better than the eager journey down the hill.

Thérèse paid no more courtesy visits to the Calvary until the occasion for which she was waiting presented itself. A second picnic was arranged, and this time there was nothing to prevent her from joining the others. To her mother's astonishment however, Thérèse declared that she had no wish to

go. The mother set it down to a quarrel with a playmate and let her have her way. The foolish little one could bite off her nose to spite her face if she wished. Thérèse was a strange child. The latter found it prodigiously hard to keep a bright face on the morning of the picnic. There was the dismal, lone, " kept-out " feeling in addition to the actual loss of the magnificent joy-day; and her mother's attitude made her feel " naughty."

" Run along, run along, silly child!" the parent said, "and tell them you've changed your mind" and Thérèse was sorely tempted. It is hard lines to be thought sulky when you are only just—oh! wanting something ever so, and aching inside. Thérèse could not take her mother into her confidence—explain how the feelings of the Christ had been hurt—her mother had not been to school with the nuns to learn what was *comme il faut*—what a king expected. She realised her loneliness more now than she had ever done before. If only there had been just one person that she might tell.

Thérèse chose the hour when the festivities in the woods would be at their height for her courtesy visit to the Calvary. She knelt there, a little lone figure, and thought of the feast in process. Of the fun and the laughter and the ride home. And then she remembered that this time she had achieved the big thing. She could tell Our Lord, verily and truly, that she had come to see Him by choice. Yes,

instead of doing the very loveliest thing in the world! She lifted her tear-stained face from her hands and smiled up at the face on the cross. Thérèse had never felt happy like this in the whole course of her life.

There happened to be a traveller, a young man dressed in dark student's clothes approaching at that moment. He caught sight of the little shining face turned up towards the Christ, and it arrested his attention—the sheer beauty and wonder of it. He was a poet as well as a good, a very good Catholic. He stopped and stood watching. It was a picture—a poem!

Old François, the shepherd, passing also at that moment through the field beyond, went home and observed, "There was a *petite fille* praying at the Calvary, and a *bon garçon* was standing watching her, and he had a face like an angel."

Then the stranger went and knelt likewise before the Christ and said his own prayers. Thérèse wondered who it might be that was kneeling beside her. A little later he overtook her on the road and asked her the way to the market town. She surveyed him with interest, as they walked along together. There was a sort of fellow-feeling between them since they had knelt side by side. She was aching with curiosity to know something, and there was a kind, merry, whimsical look in his eyes that gave her courage to be most extraordinarily

"impossible." "If you please," she asked him, "would you mind telling me if you were praying for a good journey just now?—I mean, are you going to somebody else, or were you just speaking to Our Lord?" She stopped, covered with blushes. Further explanation was absolutely necessary, and his "How do you mean?" was quite encouraging, so she plunged into it desperately, and told the young man with the face that reminded her somehow of the picture of Curé d'Ars in the Salon all about how the people who prayed before the Calvary were always thinking of somebody else; and how they never came to see Him, the Christ, except when they wanted to meet someone else. Fancy telling all that to a stranger! But the stranger was a most wonderful person. He guessed at once.

"And so you come here to make up for them?" he queried, and then the whole story came out. All about the first picnic, and how the visit had not been good enough because it was not what Our Lord wanted, and how she had waited for the second picnic and then she had been able to give the real thing. He listened, and he understood—oh! absolutely. M. le Curé would never have understood. He would have called her a silly little girl, and told her to be sure and go and enjoy herself next time. But this stranger said nothing of the kind. He said very little at first, but he made Thérèse say crowds of things that she had never been able to say to

anyone else, and when he did speak he spoke of Our Lord in such a way that it seemed almost as though the figure on the cross had spoken to her Himself. It was all so true and real. Surely Our Lord had sent along this stranger to tell her things about Himself because she had come to Him all by herself instead of going to the picnic? The other told her that he was bound for the Monastery at X——. He was going to try his vocation. People told him that he was too much of a poet to be a monk—they called him a spiritual vagabond—but he meant to try. Then he recited some of the verses that he had written about the woods and the birds and the creeping things, and the goodness of God, as they went along, until Thérèse felt her heart thrill with gratitude to the Christ on the wayside cross Who had sent this new, wonderful friend. What a joy-day it had proved to be! She recalled the perfect joy of that moment when she had looked the Christ in the face and known that she had achieved the big thing. And then He had sent M. Jules (that was his name) to tell her more about Him. Thérèse paid many courtesy visits to the Calvary in the days that followed. Perhaps on one of these occasions the Lord would send M. Jules again to tell her more about Him in magical songs or quaint little turns of speech that made things she knew already so fresh and real and wonderful, and oh, so lovable!

It proved that people were right about M. Jules,

Not many weeks later there came a visitor to the farm, a literary gentleman who wished to write his books there in the quiet. Thérèse's mother took in visitors during the summer months. Thérèse pictured some ancient and altogether snuffy personage, but a truly wonderful thing happened. When the visitor arrived who should he prove to be but her friend of the road! Jules had been found to have no vocation to the priesthood, but his was a spiritual vocation withal—that of writing in prose and verse for the good of souls. He possessed a remarkable gift for giving new expression to the great spiritual truths, and he might do wonderful things in leading souls to God in that way. It would be his life-work —his vocation. Thérèse found M. Jules by far the most easy person to talk to about religion that she had ever met. She was for ever thinking of God, and there were crowds of unanswered questions in her mind. M. Jules had an answer for them all. They became great friends, nor was the friendship to end with the summer months. It so fell out that Jules' parents took a château in the neighbourhood, and their son went and made his home with them. Jules' mother took an abiding fancy to the dainty, exquisite-mannered little maiden from the farm who was assuredly one of Nature's gentlewomen, and had the child constantly over to the château.

A curious thing happened about this time which put a stop to Thérèse's visits to the Calvary. Whether

it was an act of sacrilege or some atmosphere effect it was never known, but one day the figure on the wayside cross was found to have suffered so severe a defacement that it was necessary to remove it. The naked cross was left standing, and still remained the approved trysting-place of lovers. There was, therefore, no Christ on the cross at the foot of which Thérèse, as she grew into young womanhood, would meet Jules when the latter had a new poem which he wished to read to her, or when Thérèse wished to consult him about those things which he understood so well. Thérèse knew that it was to Jules that she owed the deeper knowledge of spiritual things that she possessed. Every day, she told herself, he was leading her nearer to the Christ to Whom her child's heart had been given. She told herself this often and with great firmness, for there were those who would have counselled her to place herself somewhere where there would be no Jules to help her with his magic gift of inspiration—his wonderful thoughts and inspiring words. People told Thérèse that she possessed a religious vocation. The Sisters of Charity—the only nuns left in France—cast covetous eyes on the girl who was a born nurse and devoted to the poor. Her vocation was the one subject that Thérèse never mentioned to Jules. He never broached it to her, although they met and talked ever about spiritual things. Jules had become a brilliant writer in defence of the Church. His

mystical poems were read by all for the sake of their exquisite inspiration. Jules' mother had definitely settled in her mind what was to happen. She watched her son with a mother's eye, and all her mother's heart cared for was his happiness in this world. There was no spiritual method of hoodwinking the maternal eye of Madame the Mother of Jules. Thérèse loved her as she loved her own mother. When the war broke out and Jules went off to fight, Thérèse was one of those who attached themselves to the Sisters as lay assistants in their work of nursing the wounded. She proved magnificently successful, both with the sick in body and the sick in mind. The Sisters told Thérèse that she had most certainly found her vocation. The good God most certainly intended her to join their Order. When they told her this Thérèse smiled to herself. How little the good Sisters knew how her spiritual life was suffering, deprived of the inspiration that it received from the presence of Jules. How she missed his voice "telling of the kingdom of Heaven." The Sisters were so busy, so overdone with their good works, that they had no time to speak of the things of which she and Jules held sweet discourse together. How desperately she longed to see him, to hear his dear voice. She knew that he would look with the bright eyes of faith on the terrible scenes around them, and sing brave songs of hope and consolation. The world had very great

need of Jules just now. And she—oh, what great need! She was more than ever convinced that Jules alone could lead her up to Christ.

Thérèse prayed to her namesake the little Carmelite nun, for the safety of Jules, and in the course of time, news came that he had been wounded in the knee. There was no apparent danger, but the hurt would disqualify him for further service in the field. Thérèse felt that her namesake had procured quite the best thing for Jules in thus placing him out of danger. She made her thank-offering, feeling at the same time that the Little Flower of Jesus knew and understood how essential Jules was to her spiritual well-being. Thérèse reminded herself of this latter fact, of the spiritual aspect of the favour, very many times. The hospital where she was stationed was in a part of the country distant from her home. Jules had been sent back to his people to be nursed. Thèrése began to long for the day when she would get leave to return and see her parents. The mails had gone wrong and letters went permanently astray. No further news came from the far-away little village where Jules was being nursed back to health. Sometimes she wondered if he would meet her on crutches. Most probably he would. But what did that matter? He was safe, and lameness wouldn't interfere with his career as an author.

Thérèse got her leave more or less of a sudden,

She wrote home, and she wrote to Jules. To the latter she gave the hour of her probable arrival, and she told him that she would be at the trysting-place at a time specified. She must meet him first alone, after all these poignant months during which they had experienced such big things. He would explain to her in ringing words the meaning of it all and sing her a joy-song of the sorrows of the world. Jules would show her the Christ for whom the Holy Sisters themselves hardly seemed to find time. He had receded from her during these busy over-wrought months, but Jules would bring Him back. The nuns parted with her affectionately. "Ah, my child," *Ma Sœur* said, "I'm thinking that when you return it will be to Our Lord Himself. You will come back to us to be a Sister of Charity, Thérèse. Our Lord means to have you!" and she bustled off to see to something in the "enclosure" of her Order, whose cloister is the Presence of God.

It was late in the afternoon when Thérèse approached the foot of the road leading up to the farm. Her journey had taken longer than she had reckoned for. She had expected to be able to go home and see her mother and father, and then, later in the day, to keep her tryst with Jules, but she had only arrived in time to do the latter. She would go on home after she had seen Jules.

As she crossed the meadow, carrying her little

handbag, she could see the tall wayside cross in the distance, its back towards her. The dear, familiar scene brought back the days of her childhood—the lonely days before she had known Jules, or known God properly. Yet she had been a fervent little soul in her way. She recalled the foregone picnic, and her first meeting with Jules. What a wonderful day that had been—the rapture of that moment when she had realised that her act of courtesy had been a perfect one. Was not that, indeed, the memory that bathed that distant day in gold? Then Jules had come to show her the Christ to Whom she had made her sterling offering. He was no longer hanging on the cross. Thérèse remembered this with something that was curiously akin to relief. She recalled that other afternoon when she had sped down the road (the upward winding lane that lay before her with her old home nestling among the trees high on the hillside) with the pain and the joy mingling in her heart, knowing that this time her visit to the Crucified would be a real and perfect act of courtesy. She could not be visiting the Christ now, for He was gone, but Jules, she told herself, would help her to that sweet realisation of Him that she had ever prayed for. She hastened her steps. He (Jules) would not be there yet, for she was early. She scanned the road. He was not yet in sight. She was standing now by the side of the cross. It was early, but her lover—yes, Jules was her lover

—might come upon her even now. Where was he, her beloved? Again she scanned the road, the road along which the miller's cart had trundled, the road that led to the château. There was no lover in sight, but as she turned and glanced for the first time at the cross she gave a little cry. It was no longer without its burden. The Christ was hanging there as He had hung in the days of her childhood, looking down with wistful eyes on those who passed by or kept their lovers' tryst. At first she thought it was a vision. She knelt down trembling and buried her face in her hands. Then she looked up. It was no vision. The figure had simply been replaced by a facsimile of the former one. It was quite new and fresh, and there was a brass plate below it. Thérèse half leant forward to read what was written there, but the light was failing, and her heart was too full for such details. What did it matter if the figure were real or a vision? The one real thing was there. The Christ, not Jules, was keeping tryst with her at the meeting-place of the betrothed. Her mind was flooded with reality. The Thérèse of the first picnic visit was once again looking Truth straight in the face; and again something turned to dust and ashes. The conflict had commenced. Would the Thérèse of the second picnic visit conquer? There went on at the foot of the Calvary a mighty struggle. She knelt there, rigid and motionless, making her resolution—seeing

straight. The Thérèse who had succeeded in deceiving herself through the years of her budding womanhood was no longer there.

Well, Jules would understand. He would not blame her. No, no! he would be glad. He had always known it, down in his heart, but he loved her so. Poor Jules! How well they had both known it—but he had loved her, and he was a poet with the defects of his ardent nature. He had meant to lead her to the Christ—but he was a poet! They had said he was too much of a poet to make a monk, but he had made a religious of many another. So *Ma Sœur* had been right.

She started and looked round. Surely that was Jules? He had come up to her unheard and was standing there. But, no. There was no one. He had not come yet. Then she looked up at the Christ, and there rushed into her heart that exquisite joy which had been hers once before. She knew its proper name now. It was the Peace of God which surpasses understanding.

Then her eyes fell on the brass plate. There was a little more light now. The evening after-glow shone upon the cross, and she was able to read what was written there. She did so mechanically. It ran:—"Of your charity pray for the soul of Jules de V——, who died from the results of a wound received whilst fighting for his country."

Thérèse knelt there reading and re-reading the

words. Then she looked up at the infinitely gracious figure of the Christ.

The thank-offering was mute in its intensity. What words had she for this infinitely gracious act of divine courtesy? The words read a moment sooner, and what would she have had to give but the imperfect gift. Had she read these words when her eye first fell on them she could not have made the perfect act of courtesy—of love—of joy. What had He not given her in the taking—this exquisitely courteous Christ? He had given her Jules, for Jules had indeed fulfilled his vocation—he had led her to the Christ; Jules, in whose memory the cross had been made to regain its burden. She had been in grave danger, indeed, of losing him, but the Christ had intervened.

Old François—he was a very, very old man now—made his way home that same evening past the Calvary. He was so old that his memory played him strange tricks. Ten or twelve years ago was fresher in his mind than yesterday, or an hour since. "I was passing the Calvary," he crooned as he crouched in his chair over the fire, "and there was a little girl praying there, and a young man was watching her, and he had a face like an angel."

THE BROWN BEADS

I HAVE just taken from my treasure-trove a rosary of brown beads, and the air has suddenly become filled with a strange, sweet perfume, subtle and indescribably exquisite; and I am wondering if under cover of that gorgeously scientific term, "psychic emanation," I may venture to tell the tale of the brown rosary, for it is one that demands telling, but which possesses the perilous quality of pointing a moral! I can only hope, as my friend Sigurdson would say, that the "psychological" will atone for the merely "spiritual" element, and gain the ear of the scientific reader bent on psychical research.

All travelled Americans, and some English folk, know the little town of St Mary's in the south of England. It takes its name from the magnificent Minster about which it has ranged itself. Everything in the town is relative to the Priory church. The ancient houses have an air of spectators crowding round a central object—the shops appear to exist in order to supply the visitor to the Minster either with refreshment, or with pictorial postcards

containing views of the exterior or interior, or of reproductions of the famous fresco of the Abbot William presenting his new church in outstretched hands to Our Lady. One Wesleyan chapel displays a fleur-de-lys in defiance of the Christian symbolism of the cruciform pile; and on the outskirts of the town a small iron building surmounted by a wooden cross puts forth the defiant legend, "St Mary's Catholic Church." These are the two instances in which St Mary's the town may not be said to be in deferential relation to St Mary's the Minster. As a matter of fact, some zealous Catholics liked to say that the little priest who had been "hung up" at St Mary's for fifteen years had become contaminated with the local subservience, and that he tolerated the Anglican aggression with a deplorably good grace, and ministered in his little "tin tabernacle" with as much contentment as though he had been saying Mass under the arches of the Minster built by his fathers in the Faith. "A most innocuous little man," one of the Deans had been known to call him—the holder of the benefice enjoys the title of Dean. At the time of which I am writing that snug office was held by a youngish man, a High Churchman, who had earned some reputation as a writer of spiritual and mystical works wonderfully Catholic in tone and sympathy. I met him frequently at the house of my friend Sigurdson, who lived, and still lives, at St. Mary's, and I always contrived to get

on well with him, for I felt that our ideals, at least, were identical. Our host belonged to a type which is becoming commoner every day. Apparently in full sympathy with the Church, a sturdy champion of her principles and action, and a devout admirer of her ritual, John Sigurdson still remained outside the fold through a fundamental difficulty in accepting not the last, but the first article of the Christian Creed. Catholic and Anglican alike endeavoured to secure him, and he, for his part, took an elvish delight in disappointing both. He would infuriate the "English Catholic" party by speaking of Catholics without the Roman in his writings (he had a great reputation as a man of letters,) and then after spending a week with Monsignor Philpot, a most persuasive controversialist, would attend a High Church function in the pious character of an Anglican layman. It was this strain of elvishness in Sigurdson that caused him to invite a certain young fellow of our acquaintance who had recently been received into the Church to stay at St Mary's. Edwy Anstruther was a graduate of Balliol—a very brilliant youngster, and, of course, bubbling over with apostolic zeal, which took the form of acute controversy: Sigurdson called it the virulent stage. "You never had it, my dear chap," he informed me; "but fools all do—most clever men are fools."

During Anstruther's visit Sigurdson invited the Dean in every night to dinner. The latter was a

bachelor, like ourselves, and only too glad to avail himself of the invitation. He rather hoped, I believe, to get our host "on the rails," as he termed it, and John Sigurdson chastened this hope periodically by contributing towards the support of the little iron church where "schism" was so very mildly rampant.

"Of course, you'll go on Sunday and hear Father Knox preach?" Edwy's host remarked. I could see the mischief in his eye. I had myself heard little Father Knox preach many times.

"Is he good?" the young man from Farm Street asked eagerly, his mind running on some provincial edition of the eminent Jesuit who had set his difficulties at rest.

"He's as good as gold," was the evasive answer, and Edwy Anstruther went on Sunday to Mass at the little "tin" church instead of cycling to Drychester, and came back fuming.

"If that's a specimen of our priests," he moaned, "Heaven convert England, for we won't! He hadn't two ideas of his own. His sermon was simply an outline lesson for a Sunday-chool. And what a church! Surely if the man had any energy he could raise the money to build a decent place to say Holy Mass in!"

"He had a try fifteen years ago," Sigurdson said, "but it came to nothing. Living in isolation in a place like this doesn't tend to nourish enthusiasm,

but his own people are very fond of him, and there is no leakage."

"We'll have to change it," Anstruther said complacently. "Fancy! in the shadow of that great church. Our fathers were made of different stuff."

"Have you been over the Minster yet?" Sigurdson asked slyly. "We'll go to-morrow if you haven't. Brian will come with us. He rather admires the high altar."

Edwy sniffed. "I'm not keen on seeing the place," he remarked. "It rather sickens me. After all, it's only the shell left."

On the following day we went over the Minster. The place was in the process of restoration, and the work was certainly being admirably carried out with a view to preserving the antiquity of the matchless pile. The whole thing got on Anstruther's nerves. There was no doubting his sincerity. "It's like a corpse!" he groaned. "The place cries out for what it was built for. It has eyes and sees not! There is all the grue of a dead body about it!"

A shabby little clergyman—I couldn't see his face—was standing with his back to us, gazing up at the work in process in the clerestory. I wondered what he thought of Anstruther's utterances. The latter's feelings had now been brought to a climax by a display of cheap literature exposed for sale in a wooden receptacle. Edwy's eye fell on a pamphlet. Its title ran, "English Catholic or Romanist?" I

had never seen anyone so near to foaming at the mouth. "It certainly is adding insult to injury," Sigurdson admitted. He looked quite a little sorry for Edwy. "If I believed in Absolute Truth that would annoy me."

"Pah!" Anstruther said, "the dead thing stinks! Let's come out of this. D—— their impudence!"

"S-sh!" someone said. It was the shabby cleric, who had been near us all the time. I saw his front view now, and, to my surprise, it proved to be no other than Father Knox, the Catholic rector of St Mary's.

Austruther recognised him too. "I beg your pardon, Father," he said, moderately abashed, "but to a Catholic this is rather sickening."

The other smiled. He was an ordinary-looking little man with rather flabby cheeks. "The place is very reverently kept," he observed. "We ought to remember that. The restoration of the clerestory has been wonderfully managed. The Dean has kindly given me permission to go up and watch the work being done."

Anstruther regarded the guardian of the Faith with something verging on contempt. "I'm afraid I can't enter into your view," he said coldly. "The symbol is nothing to me apart from the thing symbolised."

"Quite right," the other responded. "I am glad that you feel like that, sir, for you won't despise my

poor little church, if you are stopping over Sunday—so many Catholic visitors go over to Drychester to the pro-Cathedral." At this unconscious score on the little priest's part Sigurdson nudged me gleefully. I couldn't help being amused at Edwy's crestfallen countenance.

"I'm in for attending his church next Sunday," he said to us, ruefully, as we left the Minster. "It isn't the place I mind—the Mass is all I want—it's the excellent man's preaching."

"Suffer it instead of wearing your hair-shirt," Sigurdson suggested; "or if you've mislaid your scourge."

Edwy rather enjoyed this joke at his own expense. Hair-shirts and disciplines had a peculiar joy for him, conversationally, in those early days. His nerves were so jarred that I was inclined to dread his treatment of my friend the Dean that evening. By dinner-time, however, he had quite recovered his usual form. He was never long out of humour.

After dinner that evening, as we sat over the library fire, the conversation turned on certain occult subjects. The Dean was intensely psychic. Edwy had failed to precipitate his conversion by getting him on the subject of miracles having been held to have ceased with Bible times. The Dean of St Mary's believed in all the mediæval miracles! It was disheartening for our young friend, especially when the heretical cleric met the reminder that

miracles did not occur among English Churchmen with the frank admission that the English Church "had lost many good things, but still managed to rub along!" We continued the subject. Both Sigurdson and myself were researchers within legitimate limits, and to Edwy all things were possible—the boy's raw enthusiasm was not without its charm.

We were discussing the sweet odours that the relics of saints are said to exude, and how psychology admits somewhat similar phenomena, when Sigurdson suddenly got up and went over to his bureau. He came back carrying a brown rosary in his hand—the ordinary cheap beads that the peasants use in Italy. "There's a queer thing about these beads," he said, "that I can't account for. I picked them up on the beach at Pegwell Bay about a year ago. I wonder if any of you will notice anything peculiar about them?"

Anstruther took the beads and held them up close to his eyes to examine them, being short-sighted. "There's an extraordinary scent about them," he said, "like some sort of flower—or, not a flower quite. What is it?" He handed the beads on to the Dean with the question.

The latter took them in his palm and brought his thin, aristocratic nose into contact with the symbol of a "foreign" devotion.

He drew a long whiff. "It's exquisite!" he

exclaimed. "It's heavenly! Neither roses nor lilies —more like a sweet spice, yet not quite that. Whatever is it?" He raised his head and passed the rosary on to me reluctantly. Then I had my turn. It was indeed a remarkable scent, pungent, yet elusive. I could imagine it becoming intoxicating—to the spirit, that expresses it best. It had the opposite qualities of certain material perfumes.

"Do you know," Sigurdson said, "this scent is very seldom perceptible. Nineteen times out of twenty it is not there. I have frequently tested it in every conceivable way, with different temperatures, and after shutting it up in a drawer or leaving it out in the air, and I can't place the circumstances in which it acquires this extraordinary quality of giving out a perfume. I discovered it quite accidentally one evening when I was at the drawer where I keep it. I don't know, by the way, why I bothered to keep it at all, only one has a feeling about these things that have been connected with someone's devotions." The Dean nodded vigorously. "The scent was quite overwhelming. I took them out again next morning, and there was no more perfume about them than those fire-irons. I suppose the scent has been there a dozen times, or less, and I used to take it out constantly to see."

"We'll try again to-morrow," Anstruther said, when Sigurdson replaced the rosary in his bureau. "The thing is certainly worth going into with

witnesses. What wouldn't I give to know its history?"

Accordingly, on the following evening, directly we got into the library, the beads were brought out and tested. No vestige of the gorgeous perfume remained! And so it was next morning when Anstruther, impatient as usual, insisted on testing them again. We repeated the experiment the same evening just before we went off to bed, but with the same result—the brown rosary had no message of ethereal delicacies to give us. As a matter of fact, it smelt of tobacco when it had been duly examined.

On the following evening we were about to start bridge. "Let's have the beads out first," Anstruther said, and Sigurdson fetched them from his bureau. I guessed from the light in his eye what had happened. The Dean took them first, but even from where I sat I could detect the dim, delicious perfume that we had noticed on the first occasion. The Dean passed the rosary to me without a word. There were positively tears in his eyes! "God! how beautiful!" Edwy murmured, when his turn came.

I felt like the Dean, that the exquisiteness of the thing had almost unmanned me.

"I'd give the world to find out their history," Anstruther repeated. "I wonder you don't sleep with them under your pillow, John, and see if they affect your dreams."

"I did try for a long time," Sigurdson answered,

"but nothing happened, and I only detected the scent once when I went to bed early with the toothache."

"Did they cure your toothache?" I asked.

"Well," Sigurdson said, "It did get better, as a matter of fact, but I'm not vouching for a miracle. One would like to know the history of the thing. It's impossible even to get at its age. The sea-water has evidently rusted it. One medal attached to it is rather curious—St Hubert, as far as I can make out, the patron saint of dogs." (What Sigurdson knew of saint-lore might have been the envy of many Catholics.)

Edwy had lost himself in a reverie. I imagined that a hermit's cell, or possibly a vision of an ascetic individual in the garb of a byegone age, was before his eyes. I did not credit him with the very practical and astute line of thought that he was following. "Keep the beads out," he said, "and let us see how long the scent lasts." Sigurdson laid the rosary on his desk, and we applied ourselves to bridge. At the end of half an hour Anstruther got up and went over to the desk, returning with the beads. He passed them round without comment. The perfume had absolutely disappeared. When our rubber was over Edwy reverted to the subject. "If I am not greatly mistaken," he said, "I've hit on one link in the chain. Didn't you tell me, John, that you had never noticed the perfume in the morning?"

"No, I never have, as a matter of fact," Sigurdson said.

"And you only noticed it in bed when you turned in extra early?"

"Yes, that's so," was the puzzled reply.

"We'll try again to-morrow evening," Anstruther said, "and keep it under observation." On the first occasion when we noticed the scent it was just about nine-thirty; on the other occasions when we tested it, it has been either earlier or later in the evening, and Sigurdson had never noticed the scent in the day-time.

"I remember, it was exactly half-past nine on that evening when we first remarked the scent," the Dean said. "I had just looked at the clock to see how the time was going."

"'Pon my word!" Sigurdson said, "it always has been in the middle of the evening when I have noticed the scent. I can't think why it didn't strike me."

"It is certainly queer," Edwy said. "But we'll put it to the proof to-morrow evening."

I looked forward to the morrow's investigation with a certain sense of expectancy, not unmixed with a feeling of incongruity. Investigation is a word that jars where one feels that one is treading on holy ground. Fortunately, we were all four of us "sympathetic," and the atmosphere would hold nothing repugnant to the strange thing inherent in the old brown rosary.

I knew from Sigurdson's face at dinner next day that something had happened. He had been to Drychester in the afternoon. There was a peculiar twinkle in his eye that I knew well. Sigurdson's profundity of wisdom twinkled in his eye. "When Sigurdson grasps the inwardness of the Christian verities," Edwy remarked to me once, "his eyes will twinkle ever so." On this particular occasion Sigurdson's eye was full of knowingness. I knew that he was enjoying something, and that his something was better than a joke. Sigurdson had been touched somewhere, and by someone or something.

When we got into the library he started in his most elvish vein—another sign that his inner man had been touched and was in hiding!

I wondered who would be the victim, Edwy or the Dean, for we had waxed theological during dinner, and both of the latter had exhibited their defective side. Edwy had been aggressive, and the Dean had been smugly and deliberately forbearing, with a conscious air of superiority and self-approval. Soon after nine o'clock Anstruther adverted to the subject of our investigations—we had talked assiduously of other things by a sort of tacit consent. "Do you think we might get out the beads?" he suggested to Sigurdson. "We ought to have them at hand when the thing happens." There was a tone of scientific enquiry about the whole thing that rather irked me —I somehow felt that our action was an offence

against the mystical thing that had, as it were, strayed from a higher plane and so opened itself to desecration.

"I'm sorry," Sigurdson said, "but I haven't got them. The fact is, queerly enough, I discovered the owner of the beads to-day quite by accident, and, of course, I returned them."

We all sat gaping at him, the sense of being disappointed in being baulked in the pursuit of our object being more than tempered by the thought that our curiosity as to the history of the beads was to be satisfied.

"Who do they belong to? Did you discover their history?" Anstruther asked breathlessly. "How did it all happen? What a queer thing!"

"They belong to Father Knox," Sigurdson replied. "He dropped them on the beach at Ramsgate last year." He paused, with a deliberateness that I felt was a snare for the unwary. Anstruther was ever unwary.

"Where did he get it from? Is it very ancient?" he asked.

"A Protestant friend gave it to him," Sigurdson replied. "Brought it as a souvenir from Italy. No, my dear fellow, it was brand new, and not even blessed by the Holy Father! and the Italian who sold it to Knox's friend cheated him horribly, it seems."

The Dean smiled with benignity. "A little way they have," he chuckled.

"You had no business to be handling them, Dean," Sigurdson said, turning on the cleric with much gravity. "They were schismatic beads; they had not been washed across a neutral ocean from a land where the rosary is approved of."

"The rosary is not an English devotion," the Dean replied complacently.

"So the beads haven't got a history," I chipped in, anxious to get the conversation on to less controversial ground, for both Edwy and the Dean were looking dangerous.

"Well," Sigurdson said, surveying us all with an air of mild benevolence that made me wonder what was coming, "as a matter of fact, they have got a sort of history. I'll tell you the story as I got it to-day from the little priest in the train. There is just one queer point about it that makes it worth telling from the psychic point of view—the rest is merely spiritual," he added, with a twinkle in his eye; "besides, I promised that I would pass it on—it was told me on that condition. It was quite by a chance that I got the story out of the little man. I'll tell it you in his own words as much as possible." Sigurdson's manner had become just a trifle embarrassed. "I was in the train coming home from Drychester," he went on. "Just as we were starting someone tumbled into the carriage. It was little Father Knox. He was as shabby as ever, and was carrying a brown-paper parcel that too

obviously contained a cheese" (Sigurdson made a face). "When he had settled down he commenced to take snuff—a vile habit that all your clergy contract, Brian; even the 'verts get contaminated with it!" Here the Dean fitted in another smile, and Edwy, I could see, began to be exquisitely uncomfortable as to what was coming next.

"I exchanged a greeting with the Father," Sigurdson continued, "and got behind my paper. Then I bethought myself of the rosary—I suppose the priest put it into my mind. I had the beads in my pocket. I wanted to subject them to a change of atmosphere with a view to the evening's observations. I pulled them out of my pocket, and in doing so I managed to detach the little dented medal of St Hubert. It rolled across the floor of the carriage, and the Father evidently thought that I had dropped a coin, for he politely went down on all-fours to search for it. He picked up the medal and made a hasty exclamation as he looked at it. He was just going to ask me where I had got it, I suppose, when he caught sight of the rosary in my hand. Well, let me get on with the story. He recognised the beads —with evident delight as well as surprise. I told him where I had found them, and naturally offered to return them to him. He was so prolific in his thanks that he aroused my curiosity, and I was tempted to ask him if the beads possessed any history that made them of special value—I wondered if he,

too, had noticed the strange scent. He told me that their value was purely sentimental, and I felt it incumbent on me to explain my apparently impertinent question by telling him about the queer phenomenon we had all remarked—my friends as well as myself. He listened quite politely. 'It might be seaweed,' he suggested brilliantly. I told him that we had thought of something rather less prosaic, and imagined that some sort of history would be attached to the beads.

"He smiled and shook his head. 'Their story is very simple,' he said, 'yet—is the young man who was in the Minster the other day one of the friends who is interested in them?' I told him it was so, and he paused and thought a moment. 'I've been worrying about him,' he said. 'I'm afraid I disedified him the other day—that I threw cold water on his admirable zeal.'" The Dean looked interrogative. Anstruther was mounted well on the defensive. Sigurdson seemed almost to have forgotten the presence of either. It was distinctly awkward! He went on: "'Now, I wonder, sir, if I told you the little story connected with the rosary, if you would mind repeating it to your young friend. It might undo the harm I did. It is not right to let people misunderstand one; it gives scandal. That young man has been much on my mind.'" Edwy snorted amusedly at this point, and the Dean spread his finely chiselled mouth across his thin face and

looked as any Dean would wish to look in a photograph.

"I'm going to tell you the story exactly in the little priest's words," Sigurdson said. "Here goes!"

"'That rosary was given to me nearly twenty years ago by a Protestant friend of mine who had been travelling in Italy. I put it away at the time because I was rather piqued at the tone of semi-contempt that he assumed in giving it to me—he was careful to tell me that the man who sold it to him had cheated him, and he attached the little medal that I recognised it by as a present to my dog Cæsar. My dog Cæsar made the dent in it with his teeth, by the way, when it was introduced to his notice. I was inclined to be touchy in those days. I had been sent to St Mary's, and the mission was even poorer than it is now. I didn't always get cheese to eat even'—he glanced at the eloquent package as he said this. 'I had met with discouragement, too. I had tried to raise the money to erect a brick building in place of the iron church, and a Catholic gentleman in the neighbourhood had promised me a large sum towards it, on the strength of which I got an architect to draw up the plan of a neat little Gothic structure. I was beside myself with delight at the prospect when my benefactor died suddenly, and the estate passed to a Protestant who, when I told him of his kinsman's intention, promptly gave an equivalent sum to the Minster. All this tended to

make me rather bitter. Like your friend, the very sight of the Minster was more than I could bear. I relieved my feelings by writing trenchant articles for the Catholic press, which I am sorry to say were considered smart journalism. They were very widely read. All I remember was that there was very little Christianity in them. They were highly praised from the controversial point of view.'"

Sigurdson smiled at us. "You are trying to apply the idea of a trenchant writer of scathing polymics to our little friend?" he said. "That's precisely what I did, and I nearly lost the thread of the narrative in trying to reconcile that statement with the story that the worthy man was pouring in my ear. Let me try and tell it exactly as I heard it. Picture to yourselves that I am little Father Knox."

The Dean smiled, with slightly lifted eyebrows. "I'll try," he said meekly.

Sigurdson turned his chair round and addressed the fire. "One day, it was the eve of Candlemas, I was feeling particularly bitter. I had walked into Drychester to buy candles. I had been saving up so as to get a good quantity, and just as I got back to St Mary's I came over queerish. The Minster was near at hand, and the door open, which was not always the case in those days as it is now, and so I thought I had better go in and sit down for a bit—I didn't want to be seen reeling in the streets,

it might have been misinterpreted! Well, I went into the Minster. It was about seven o'clock and the place was lighted up. I suppose they were preparing for a choir practice or something. There was nobody about. I crept into the chantry of Abbot William, where you see the fresco of the Abbot offering his church to Our Lady, and sat down quietly. Soon I began to feel better, but as I looked at the magnificent proportions of the great choir and thought of my poor, mean little sanctuary, my heart grew hot within me, and I thought some very hard things, some very hard things indeed, of those who were in possession of all this, and yet had no use for it. Then I turned my thoughts to my sermon for the morrow.' " Sigurdson suddenly broke off. "I forget what the little chap's words were exactly," he said rather lamely. "My mind went off on to those slashing controversial papers while he was telling me this part, but the gist of it was that he fell to wondering how the Blessed Virgin felt when she saw the rich Hebrew ladies making their offerings against which her two doves showed up so poorly? And then " (Sigurdson's tone had become very gruff, and he spoke hurriedly) "he suddenly seemed to realise that she wouldn't have minded at all, because, after all, she had got God to offer to God, while they had only their human gifts. And then, while he was soaking in this idea, a rather queer thing seems to have

happened." (Sigurdson's tone had become natural again. He addressed us instead of the fireplace.) "He found himself looking at the fresco, and he became aware that there was something different about it. He got up—notice this, he wasn't asleep—and went nearer, and then he declares that the figure of the Abbot appeared to be holding in its outstretched hands, not a model of the Minster, but of the little tin Catholic Church of Our Lady. It gave him such a shock that he let go of his parcel, and all the candles, the string giving way, fell out and rolled on to the ground. He started picking them up—they had rolled all over the place, and they were pretty precious—and when he had done so, he looked again at Abbot William, but he had got his own church back and all was the same as usual.

"This part of the story," Sigurdson said, "interested me so much that the little man took fright lest I should take it that he had been seeing visions. 'It was just an illusion,' he hastened to explain. 'I was half-famished, and capable of imagining anything, but it had a very strange effect.'" Sigurdson suddenly wheeled his chair round and addressed the glowing logs. We had to lean forward to catch his words. He had set himself the task of telling the tale, and he went on sturdily.

"'I seemed to realise suddenly what I possessed, and a new, wild joy took hold of me. I felt how I was to be envied by those who had nothing to offer

to Almighty God but human things—walls and arches and stained glass. I, with the Tabernacle on my poor little altar! and the Holy Sacrifice in my hands!'"

The Dean cleared his throat, but interruption would have been impossible.

"'I could have sung with the fulness of my joy. It came to me like a great new gift, this knowledge that I had possessed all along. But, sir, how I pitied those who had not my possessions! A terrible remorse overtook me for all my hard thoughts towards those who deserved all gentleness—the "have-not" of the good God's dispensation. Well, I went home like a man in a dream, feeling as though someone had left me a fortune, and I went straight into my little church and made a thanksgiving; and before I left I said five decades of the rosary for the health and happiness and welfare of those who were in possession of Abbot William's church. And that evening I registered a vow that I would say a rosary every day for that same intention in expiation of my sin of uncharity. Then I remembered the non-Catholic friend who had given me the rosary and I got a fancy to use the brown beads for this purpose—I felt somehow it would bring him into it. Years afterwards I heard that he had had the good fortune to meet Monsignor Whitman, who, of course, succeeded in bringing him into the Church.'" Sigurdson smiled slyly across at me. The Monsignor

had been an intimate friend of his for many years. His tone became slow and deliberate:—

"'For fifteen years I have never missed saying that rosary, and I always used the brown beads up till a year ago, when I had the misfortune to drop them on the beach when I was on my holiday at Ramsgate. Perhaps it was just as well; I was getting almost superstitiously attached to those beads—as though they could have had a particular virtue of their own.' This idea tickled him mightily.

"'But how on earth did you manage to keep it up?' I asked him.

"'Method, sir,' he answered. 'Our Church achieves everything by method, and her enemies call it mechanical! I arranged with myself always to say those five decades at the same hour as that on which I first said them, and I have scarcely ever failed, except in cases of emergency, in saying it at that hour.'

"'And what hour was that, Father?'" I asked.

"He told me." Sigurdson suddenly turned round and faced us.

"It was half-past nine in the evening."

He continued: "Well, I naturally had to give up the beads. He took them and stuffed them in the pocket where he kept the snuff-box. 'It's just a silly fancy,' he said, 'but I expect I shall use them again to-night.' I know what those beads have been

smelling of since "—Sigurdson's tone hurled defiance at us all—" snuff!"

Then the clock struck the half hour after nine. He had timed his story well.

The Dean broke the silence that was getting too tense for comfort. " I think I'll be getting home," he said. He shook hands with us all, an unusual proceeding when we met daily.

"Ah," Sigurdson said, "you're wise to be getting to bed. I can hear a cold coming. You've got it from me. You'll excuse me coming out; Brian will see you off the premises."

I accompanied the Dean to the door and we walked the length of the drive together. Neither of us spoke but we clasped hands again at the gate.

I stood watching his retreating figure. The house stood on high ground outside the town. The road forked a little lower down. On the left lay the Minster, standing out in all its beauty against the starlit sky. On the right the cluster of outlying cottages, in the midst of which stood the little "tin" church and the yellow brick presbytery where, at that moment, the spiritual descendent of William the Abbot knelt telling his beads for the health, happiness, and welfare of those who ministered according to their lights in the great church yonder. And as I stood there, watching the retreating figure approaching the divided way, the air seemed filled with fragrance—a pot-pourri from the heavenly

flower garden—the odour of Charity—the scent of the brown beads.

That is the story of the rosary which lies in my hand. It came into my possession on the death of Father Knox, together with some MSS., which he instructed me to destroy after reading. "I would trust no other but you with it." he said, lying there on his death-bed. "It was my safety-valve. I got things off my chest that way and it avoided uncharity, as no one read it." The papers contained some of the finest controversial squibs that I have ever met. They were addressed to So-and-so, "apropos of what you said the other day." Their value to the literature of polemics is a thing I hardly dare to contemplate, for I kept my word and destroyed them. I offered the brown rosary to Sigurdson, but he refused to accept it on the grounds that he was "still outside the Church." He is still outside the Church, but since the little Father's death I have seen a real change in him, and I have at last become assured that his coming is a practical certainty—he has at last found faith, the fundamental that he lacked, and which the Dean, with all his prejudices, possessed. (The Dean, by the way, has resigned his living on the grounds of ill-health and gone to live in Italy. This happened some time before the death of Father Knox.)

So I think of my friend Sigurdson as I look at

the brown beads, and from force of association there seems to arise from the latter an ever-present delicious perfume that once haunted it at certain times and seasons—the odour of Charity; and I am tempted to ask if the wonder worked in the mind of my friend is not a miracle wrought by prayer—the efficacious prayer of one who no longer sees through a glass darkly, but knows exactly as he is known.

GRATIAS

THE shrine of Our Lady of Grace, which stands in a big Catholic Church, up a very shy side street, in a very fashionable neighbourhood somewhere in England, has a private reputation for being miraculous. The reputation is a strictly private and unofficial one ; the clergy are very particular that it should be so, for unauthenticated "miracles" frequently lead to disedification. The walls of the chapel of Our Lady are lined with votive tablets attesting to favours received, and it has been suggested that some of these were erected in a hurry — that the recipients of the favours were "too previous." The big marble slab bearing the inscription "Gratias," in huge lettering, is a case in point. The miracle it commemorates is said to have proved to have been only temporary in its nature. Personally, I disagree with the "devil's advocate" on that point. I have the whole story from the client himself, and if I set it down the reader may be able to form his own judgment in the matter, for there has been much discussion as to whether the tablet ought not to be removed.

As this narrative is intended for the thoughtful grown-up reader, I must apologise for asking him to get inside the mind of a child to begin with. Phoebe is the little blue-eyed girl who sits with her mother in the side aisle of the Church of Our Lady of Grace. For years, ever since she learnt to read, the tablets on the walls of the Lady Chapel have proved a great boon to Phoebe. During a long sermon, and the sermons at Sunday High Mass are always long—stiff, controversial discourses—it is possible to make up all kinds of stories about the different tablets, and the people who put them up. Phoebe used to do this assiduously until the khaki man in the seat in front distracted her attention. The live khaki man was as bread to her imagination compared with a stone. He was really little more than a boy, but to Phoebe he was magnificently grown up. He became her hero during a course of sermons preached by Monsignor Chrysostom. These sermons were very long, so were the words of which they were made up, but Phoebe didn't mind after she discovered the khaki man. He evidently enjoyed the sermons, for he always kept listening, although he did not behave as nicely at other times as he might have done. He never crossed himself at the Gospel, for instance, and he only half knelt at the Consecration. He had particularly nice eyes that twinkled when he was amused. A pleasant intercourse was established between Phoebe and the

khaki man through the latter's stumbling over her as he came out of his seat. She was genuflecting and he didn't attempt to do so—the result being that he came on the top of Phoebe. After that they smiled when they encountered one another. It was very thrilling—if Phoebe had been one whit less devout than she was she would have been tempted to feel glad that the khaki man's mother had been wicked enough to forget to teach him to genuflect. As it was, their friendship ripened into a word of greeting when they met outside church.

When the khaki man ceased to put in his appearance, Phoebe had a terrible fear that he had gone to the front. As it happened, she was right. Then, a very few weeks later, he reappeared. But, alas! the twinkling eyes were covered by a bandage. Phoebe's hero had been wounded, and perhaps he was going to be blind for ever and ever! He had a friend with him, and as they walked away from church Phoebe and her mother walked just behind the pair. They were talking to one another, and Phoebe listened to what they were saying.

"You Catholics are as bad as the rest of us," the khaki boy said. "You believe in mascots and charms. If I were the sort of fellow who wears a bit of touchwood, I'd have a shot at your 'Lady of Grace,' and ask her to cure my eyes."

"And supposing she did cure them?" the other queried.

The khaki boy thought a moment.

"I'd call it coincidence," he said. "It could only be coincidence. But," he added (no doubt his eyes would have twinkled if they had retained their efficiency), "I'd give her the tablet of marble, or whatever else I'd vowed—it wouldn't be cricket not to. We'd play the game."

Phoebe had never heard anyone talk in such a queer way, except Monsignor Chrysostom, perhaps. It was rather like Monsignor Chrysostom. She hadn't the remotest idea what he meant, but his curious words gave her an idea. Why should not she ask Our Lady of Grace to cure her hero's eyes—make him see? She would promise Our Lady a big marble slab with "Gratias!" written on it, like one that she specially admired. Her governess had taught her that *gratias* meant "thank you!" She possessed a money-box with five entire shillings in it. For so vast a sum as five shillings the finest of tablets could surely be purchased! It was, indeed a great idea. Phoebe made all haste to present her petition to Our Lady of Grace. She knelt before the altar in the marble-lined chapel, and promised and vowed to Our Lady a fine, proper marble tablet on which should be duly graven the Latin word *Gratias*, meaning "Thank you!"

Phoebe made her compact with the utmost formality, using the longest words she knew, although, as a rule, she was quite homely with Our

Lady. She went away feeling very important. It was quite the biggest thing she had undertaken. Our Lady of Grace had become a queenly and awe-inspiring figure. Others have felt the same who have deliberately entered into a bargain in the way Phoebe had done.

Phoebe made a novena of prayers on her hero's behalf. "Please, Holy Mother, make him see!" her prayer ran; and on the tenth day a magnificent thing happened. A stupefying thing! She was kneeling at Our Lady's altar (she was allowed out alone to visit the church, which was quite near her home), when who should approach but the khaki man and his friend; and, lo! the former was no longer wearing the bandage! His eyes looked a little queer, perhaps, but he could plainly see with them. She had asked Our Lady that he might see. The two men came and stood close by where she was kneeling.

"There!" the khaki man said to his companion, "if I'd prayed for a miracle to your Lady of Grace, you'd have attributed this to her doing. The doctors call it a miracle. They can't account for it. You didn't happen to pray to her on my account, did you, by the way?"

The other was obliged to admit that he had not thought of doing so. "But supposing I had?" he asked. "How would you have felt about it?"

The khaki boy thought for a long time, and his

answer was rather lame. "But the fact remains that you didn't," he said. "The 'miracle' has been accomplished without any supernatural agency, like all so-called miracles. No doubt, all the favours commemorated on these tablets are coincidences, but one can forgive it—it's an uncommonly pretty idea."

The other spoke up warmly.

"About the last thing Our Lady would forgive," he said, "would be a 'pretty idea' that encroached on Truth. I can tell you that this place deals in awful realities. I should not advise anyone to exploit 'pretty ideas' here." The khaki boy was silent. He remembered Monsignor Chrysostom saying something of the kind in one of his sermons —how the Mother of Divine Truth was "as terrible as an army set in array."

Phoebe didn't try to understand what they were saying. All she knew was that Our Lady of Grace had made her hero see. It was more wonderful than anything in a story-book. Then, being a very conscientious little girl, she immediately turned her thoughts to her side of the bargain. She must make haste and get her "Thank you!" tablet set up in its place. So anxious was she to discharge this obligation that she barely waited to say her verbal "Gratias!" She ran out of the church, across the road, and into the shop of a stone-mason which good fortune had placed there, within the pale of her unattended peregrinations.

The gentleman in the shop sacred to tombstones was a suave and melancholy person, with a manner to match his calling. He surveyed Phoebe with stupendous gravity.

"Please," the latter gasped breathlessly, "I want a big piece of marble to stick on a wall with the word 'Gratias' on it. If you please, how much will it cost?"

"You mean a mural tablet," the melancholy person said, and a slight note of perplexity crept into his smooth, resigned tones. Children of tender years were not his normal customers.

"What did you say you wanted written on it?" he asked.

"'Gratias!' It means 'Thank you!'" Phoebe explained.

The mason was a Protestant, with a Protestant connection. He began to look suspicious. "Gratias" might be a German word, and his client the offspring of a German spy. The whole thing was abnormal! but the business instinct held good. If a Zeppelin bomb had conveyed the message, "What price tombstones?" Mr Graves would have quoted prices, as per catalogue.

"Grat-i-as," he repeated. "Lettering comes to something under a shilling a letter. It would be about five shilling extra for the inscription."

Phoebe felt her heart sink into her shoes. "Please, what would the whole cost, then?" she asked faintly.

The melancholy man named a sum beyond the dreams of avarice. Never in her wildest dreams could Phoebe hope to accumulate such a sum in her money-box. "Thank you," she whispered very meekly, and crept out of the tombstone shop dismally enlightened in the economics of mural decoration. She was feeling terribly, horribly guilty. What would Our Lady think of her? Phoebe's bringing-up had been on lines that put truth and sincerity in the highest place. Her father had been a soldier and died for his country years ago. A strict sense of honour had been inculcated into his daughter. Broken promises—promises made rashly with no intention of fulfilment—these were cardinal sins. Never say what you don't mean to anyone, had been a nursery maxim, and now it looked uncommonly as though Phoebe had said what she didn't mean to Our Lady herself. Had not she just been hearing her hero's friend saying how Our Lady loathed shams? And, oh, shame!—had not her hero himself said once in her hearing that if Our Lady did cure his eyes he would carry out whatever he had promised, whatever happened. He had said something funny, but it had been something to the effect that it would be particularly mean not to keep one's word in such a case.

Poor Phoebe! She had indeed obtained her favour, but she had obtained it on false pretences. What would her father say—her dead father,

whose Victoria Cross hung on the drawing-room wall in a glass case?

For some days she had a detestably bad time. Then she suddenly received comfort from an unexpected quarter. Monsignor Chrysostom was giving a series of sermons on Church History. He used longer words than ever—"continuity" came in again and again—but on one point he was thrillingly interesting. It more than compensated for the absence of the khaki man, who no longer occupied the seat in front. The preacher was describing the condition of the Catholic Church in England during the penal days. He described, among other things, the substitute for an altar stone used by the missionary priests. It consisted of a piece of common slate, like a child's school slate, on which five crosses were scratched; and, in God's sight, this was exactly the same as a marble altar. The marble was not an essential—the Mass was. That was the point the preacher brought out, and Phoebe listened in a rapture of joy. It was all perfectly simple. All she had to do was to take her old schoolroom slate and write "Gratias!" on it, and present it to Our Lady with the explanation that it was the best she could do.

The plan was quite easily carried out. That same afternoon, Phoebe, bearing under her arm her lessons slate, on which she had laboriously inscribed the word "Gratias!" in her best copy-book hand, sought

an audience of the Rector. She must, of course, ask him to place her mural monument for her in the Lady Chapel. The space which she selected in her mind for its reception had stared her out of countenance for days past—like an empty eye-socket.

The Rector, tired after a long day, was making his evening sermon when Phoebe asked to see him. Her mother was an old friend. He concluded it was a message, and Phoebe was admitted. I'm afraid he didn't listen very much to what she had to say. He smiled at the slate, shook his head, and told her to run home, after giving a little trite advice to the effect that Our Lady liked little girls who tried to please her by being obedient, and so on, and so on. He didn't understand in the least that Our Lady loathed and despised dishonourable little girls who broke their word.

Phoebe was heart-broken. She went back into church from the sacristy, and, kneeling down before Our Lady's altar with her despised make-shift at her side, wept copiously.

"Is anything the matter?"

It was the voice of her khaki man at her side, He was regarding her with his kind, though still rather peculiar-looking eyes.

Phoebe blushed furiously, but he was so kind and insistent that she found herself blurting out her story—in a guarded fashion, of course. She had

asked Our Lady to make someone see, and she had done so, and then the tragedy of the mural monument, and the subsequent substitution of the slate, on the principle followed by the martyr priests, into which she went at some length, for the khaki boy was an exquisite listener, and they had retired to a bench where they could talk all right.

The khaki man's merry eyes twinkled. It was very snobbish of the Rector, he opined unreasonably, not to accept the substitute. "And can your friend really see all right?" he queried.

"Why, yes!" Phoebe retorted—then, her training in accuracy of speech asserting itself, she added hastily: "You *can* see all right, can't you?"

She had given herself away hopelessly. She blushed as red as a lobster, and became dumb with embarrassment. The khaki man ought to have been amused at the naïve manner in which the client of Our Lady of Grace had given away her secret, but he remained serious, and looked just a little bit startled. Humour and pathos were prominent in the simple recital, but there was another feeling that swamped both for the moment. Someone had really prayed for him. His miracle had, in truth, been preceded by prayer to the Lady of Wonders. His assertion that there had been no supernatural agency had been belied by this unconscious little maiden, whose prayers were surely as pure and heart-whole

as any ever offered. To put them in the same category as the occult rites of people who touch wood, or attach an inexplicable value to a string of rosary beads, borrowed from a Catholic in the trenches, as a mascot against the enemy's bullet, was to see the two in contrast.

" So I owe my sight to you," he said, and offered her his big brown hand. He could not decently be sceptical with her, and he was inexpressibly touched by the generosity that had offered the entire wealth of the money-box to procure the desired end.

There were two ways open to him, as he sat there before the shrine of Our Lady of Grace. He could accept the miracle and make his confession of faith—he was actually at the threshold of the Church, but something, which he called intellectual doubts, held him back—or he could thrust his tongue into his cheek and say " Thank you !" in marble to the Lady of Grace. There was no third way. In common decency he must set his little would-be benefactor's mind at rest by seeing that the promised tablet was duly erected.

He arranged it all with Phoebe there and then. The marble tablet should be ordered and duly set up, and he would pay for it, and she should give him her slate as a souvenir. That was quite fair. Surely his eyes were well worth it ?

Phoebe fixed her big blue Irish eyes on him while he said this, and suddenly he felt ashamed of himself.

He was " rotting " her. What a fraudulent cad he was. And he was " rotting " someone else—the Lady, Mother of Divine Truth, who was "as terrible as an army set in array."

For the moment, there, with the atmosphere of the chapel about him, he was quite wholesomely ashamed, but when he got free of the little wonder-corner that the clergy have to guard so assiduously from idle and superstitious inquirers, the feeling wore off. Perhaps there was a spice of defiance in the attitude of mind in which he set about ordering a more than usually imposing tablet. This attraction to the Catholic Church was a palpable and personal onslaught. He got on the defensive, and his weapon, like that of many a one with his back to the wall, was flippancy. Of course, he must " play the game." Our Lady should have a perfectly correct votive offering. The idea was quite " pretty and picturesque." It would please the little blue-eyed ladykin, too, with her sturdy sense of honour.

So the mural monument was duly ordered and set up in the Chapel of Our Lady, and the despised slate found a place on the khaki man's mantelpiece among the priceless oddments that an exceedingly wealthy and highly artistic young man gets together, and glories in. The khaki boy sat in his luxurious arm-chair in front of the fire, and meditated on the new addition to his curios. He remembered what Phoebe had told him about the missionary priests

and their pieces of slate "that didn't matter, because it was only the Mass that mattered." He had received the usual English schoolboy's doses of "doctored" history, and he had never come across the Church of the persecution days in his studies of Catholicism. As he looked at the slate, there crept over him an uncomfortable sense of an "unrealised reality" lying behind the externals that for him made up the Roman Catholic Church. It was fascinating, this new idea, if it was discomfiting. A few days later, when calling on his Catholic friend, he came across a volume on the latter's book-shelves which proved to be a history of the Elizabethan Missionary priests. "Could you lend me this, old chap?" he said, "I'd rather like to have a look at it."

"Delighted," the other replied, "but the doctors have knocked off your reading, haven't they? And the print of that book you've got hold of isn't up to much. It's a fat book, too."

"Oh that's all right," the khaki boy said, "I'll only dip into it. I only want to see one or two things."

But he didn't dip. He sat up and read the entire fat volume off at a sitting. The Romance of the English martyr-priest is the most thrilling chivalric record in the language. It went straight to the imagination of the khaki boy, who had been one of the first to "chuck" his life of pleasurable pursuits and join Kitchener's Army. Set in relief against the

pomp and circumstance of the Church's normal ceremonial, the pageant of the secret Mass, devoid of every unessential adjunct, is the touch of genius that brings the reality of the faith home to the mind of the outsider. It made him see.

The next day the khaki boy's eyes were inflamed. The doctor examined them and ordered the patient back into a dark room. Now, sitting in a dark room gives a rare opportunity for cogitating. The khaki boy digested his reading in an environment conducive to meditation. After a while he sent a request to the Very Reverend Monsignor Chrysostom to pay a visit to a poor blind soldier. The Monsignor came, and they had the first of many long talks. The English martyrs, the knight-errant of the Church in England, had gripped the warrior spirit of the khaki boy.

One day, some weeks later, there was a little round table with a white cloth set out in the Chapel of Our Lady of Grace. It held a glass basin containing water, and a book of the Gospels lay on it. The Sacristan cleared the church of stray prayerful people. There was going to be a convert received, a not uncommon happening. Presently the khaki boy was led in, and up to the Lady Chapel. His eyes were unbandaged, but they saw nothing. On the wall was a dazzling new marble tablet, bearing the word "Gratias!" in large letters, but the khaki boy could not see it, for his

"miracle" had been a temporary one, and he was stone blind.

The question of the tablet's remaining in its place occupied the minds of two people, the Rector and Phoebe. The latter had been completely nonplussed by Our Lady's strange action. It were not as though she, Phoebe, had really broken her rashly-given word, for there stood the tablet, grand beyond her wildest dreams of stone-embodied gratitude. She had become great friends with her khaki hero. He had asked her mother to let her go in and be eyes to him, and they were the best pals imaginable. "Don't you think," she asked him, "that Our Lady would rather that you took the tablet back? I would in her place, wouldn't you?"

"But why?" he asked. "You asked Our Lady to make me see, didn't you? Well, she *has* made me see. It's like this"—he leant forward in his chair, and fixed his unseeing eyes on something—"I can't see the Tabernacle now, it's true, but I can see—what's inside it; and that's most certainly Our Lady's doing."

The Rector made a similar suggestion to him in regard to the tablet.

"My dear Father," the khaki boy said, "so far from removing that bit of marble, I am having a much more complete thankoffering to Our Lady of Grace fixed up in my house in the country. I'm going to have an oratory lined with marble all over

the walls except in one place, where I'm going to have that piece of slate let in." He pointed in the direction of the mantelpiece, and the Rector saw there a child's school-slate, on which was written, in a large, laboured round hand, the word "Gratias!"

THE LADY

You have asked me, Marcella, to write down the story of how I came to believe in the Christ exactly in the words in which I tell it; and then you say that you mean to transcribe it from papyrus to imperishable parchment so that it may live for ever! —You say that you will have it buried with you so that it may be in a safe place where the Lord can find it, if He wants it, until the end of the world, which may not be so very near after all. It is easier to tell a simple tale, and mine is so very simple, with the tongue than with the pen. It will look strange, methinks, on parchment, like the writings of the divines and doctors—yet I will try. I will tell my little story just as though you and I were sitting in the Garden which the Lord loved, talking of the things that will happen over the eternal hills.

It was sixty years ago, when I was a girl of twenty or so, that I first came in contact with Christianity, as we call it nowadays. In the days when our blessed Father Paul was preaching, and holy John

was still in Jerusalem, I was living at Antioch with my parents. There were many in those days who had actually seen the Lord—men of His own generation. I heard the story of Jesus of Nazareth first from a friend of our family who had joined the Christian sect. When my father discovered that Demetrius was a Christian he immediately put an end to the intimacy. He and my mother, and my sister Diana, were terribly shocked. We all liked Demetrius. No, this is not a love story! Perhaps I liked him less than the others did, but his story of the Christ held me spell-bound. I longed to hear more. My father and mother were too horrified at the idea of Christianity, for to them it meant a lawless and seditious fanaticism, deeply tinged with vice, to even suspect that one of their children would be fascinated by its teachings. In secret I learned all I could of the new, strange, enthralling ideals that Christianity embodied. I loved and worshipped them, but I could not bring myself to believe that it was all actually true. My father had given me a magnificent intellectual training, and I trusted much to my reasoning faculties which he had so carefully and patiently cultivated. I went in secret to hear the Christian preachers. Some of these moved me for the moment. Peter's sincerity, for instance, no one could doubt, yet I asked myself, might he not be deluded? Demetrius introduced me to converts full of zeal and learning, with whom I

had arguments. None of these had actually seen the Lord. What manner of man, I wondered, was the Christ Himself? Oh, to have seen Him as Peter had done! To know the manner of man that He was.

I came to possess a very tender and wistful regard for the Christians. It cut me to the quick to hear them discussed at my father's table with such terrible misapprehension. It hurt me unbearably even while I had doubts as to the sanity of Peter, and while the written words of Paul were ever conveying, like an echo, the rejoinder, "but it is not true, not *true!* For could not a genius like Saul of Tarsus construct all this on an idea—manufacture the evidence in his abnormal brain? I loved discussing the subject with Demetrius. He was so adroit in argument, one could admire where one disagreed, yet he too failed to help me after a certain stage. I think his emphatic way of putting things rather made one differ instinctively. It would certainly hurt my pride to give in to Demetrius, much as I longed to believe. He was remarkably learned in the law of the Jews, and could show me how all the ancient prophecies had been fulfilled. I have seldom met a clearer or keener thinker.

As time went on the Christian belief became to me something more than an interesting hypothesis. It began to trouble me. I had learned all that there was to be learnt. Yet, I told myself, I could not believe. I had reached the stage when I could no

longer bear to hear the followers of Christ maligned in silence. I shall never forget the first occasion on which the members of my family realised that I had fallen under the Christian spell. I suddenly came out with a vehement utterance—it was one of those little incidents that form milestones in our lives. I brought it out in spite of myself, for I was morbidly sensitive to home criticism. I think what I said was this: "If Christianity is not true, then I'm very sorry, that's all." My mother glanced at me, and then looked quickly across at my sister. Then she gave a heavy sigh. She was a gentle-hearted woman who dreaded unseemly happenings. She knew, poor soul! that I possessed a trend towards the unconventional. My father was a grand man—upright and self-disciplined. I never knew him to correct in temper, or to punish a mistake, but when he came up against real wrong-doing he could be severe beyond mere temper. He had never been angry with me before. Now he turned his eyes on me with the cold steel of disapproval in them. He made no comment. To him Christianity stood for all that is base. To embrace it meant to wilfully debase the higher parts of man. As for my sister Diana, she had heard the stories they told about the worshippers of Christ. She knew me not to be vile by nature, and I knew that she concluded that the hero-worshipping tendency which had displayed itself at school (Diana

had never been known to adore a preceptress) had drawn me into a trap laid by some cunning individual who had cast the spell of personality over me. She looked absolutely—physically, sick. I think Diana's attitude was hardest of all to bear.

I went out that day with an overwhelming sense of loneliness—of bitter isolation. I had become an alien, a rather nauseating alien, in my own home. Nay, more, a stranger, and a very unpleasant, unfamiliar stranger, to myself. It was the acme of desolation—that clearing out of my soul for what it was to receive.

We had then come to live in Jerusalem, quite recently, from Antioch. I no longer had Demetrius to go to, and I doubt if I would have done so in my present state. Demetrius rankled in my mind in connection with Diana's obvious and unfounded suspicions. I could recall now many oblique allusions that stung me like burning arrows. Christianity had lost its magic. Yet where was I to go? I had a letter of introduction to the elders of the Church in Jerusalem that Demetrius had given me. I told myself, grimly, that now was the time to test my convictions—now, when the intellectual side alone remained—when my dangerous emotions were benumbed by the sting of the home wound.

Doggedly I turned my steps to the corner of the city where the Christian elder lived to whom my

introduction was addressed. He proved to be a gentle, scholarly man, very kind and patient. He listened to my difficulties, which seemed to rise up with seven-fold force, and answered them as skilfully as Demetrius would have done. He, too, showed me the law and the prophets and explained the prophecies. He was a wonderful thinker, and the strange sanctity that all the more matured members of the Christian Church seemed to possess was very marked in him. But my undersanding was hardened, or my heart. I could not be convinced. My instructor took infinite pains. Presently he went and fetched another presbyter, and they conversed together at a little distance off. I heard them mention the name of the great doctor, John. At that time he was still in Jerusalem and had not yet elaborated his famous theme of the *Logos*, but his high doctrine was known privately to the more scholarly portion of the Church. Demetrius revelled, with his Greek way of thinking, in the wonderful exposition of the central Christian truth afterwards given to the Church at large. I grew greatly excited at the thought that I was to be referred to this great doctor. I was also more than a little afraid. I wanted to do my education justice, and my head was buzzing with the pros and cons of our recent conversation. After a short consultation my instructor returned to me with a scrip in his hand. This he gave me, and bade me bear it to the house

of John, to which latter place a servant would guide me. So I set out for the great teacher's house, feeling, as I have said, half afraid. They said the Christ had loved this man for his charity, but was it not also he who denounced idols, and was not my father's house full of idols? What would he require of me in that fierce zeal for what he held to be the truth?

The servant conducted me to a still more obscure corner of the city. The entrance to the preacher's house was in a little courtyard. It was a mean place, and surrounded by places of no good repute. What would my mother have said could she have seen me there?—or Diana? I did not have long to wait on the threshold. Soon the figure of a woman approached from within. In the dim light I could not see much of her—I suppose I was nervous, but I seemed able to grasp very little except that she was smiling at me.

"You are Agatha," she said simply, not asking a question, but stating a fact, and I followed her in, wondering how on earth they had prepared her for my visit. The room she took me into was poor and bare. A newly-kindled fire burned on the hearth, for it was a cold day, but otherwise nothing was suggested but the utmost poverty. And yet, there was an air of dignity about the place that I could not account for — that I have tried to reproduce since in other places by banishing all unnecessary

furniture from an apartment. But I have never achieved that majestic result.

The lady led me to a seat by the fireside. She sat down opposite me. I saw that I would have to wait for my "audience," and this, of course, I was quite prepared for. I glanced at the face before me. It was in the shadow—a worn, curiously beautiful face. I could form no idea of its owner's age.

She regarded me for a few moments. "So you are not a Christian yet," she said, in the same tone of stating a fact. It drew forth an answer more irresistibly than any question could have done. I gave my reason:—

"No," I replied, "I am not yet able to believe."

She went on regarding me quietly, with shrewd eyes, into which there crept a smile.

"And why not?" she asked. And she sat there smiling at me steadily while I racked my brains to formulate my principal reasons for remaining outside the Christian Church. They suddenly seemed to have become rather paltry, I discovered, and I had a feeling, furthermore, that she could fathom their paltriness, yet it was with the gentlest interest that she was awaiting my answer. There was no scorn in her amusement.

When my answer came it was a curious one—one I had never cited before, never dreamt of acknowledging. "My parents are worshippers of Diana," I

said; "I don't know what would happen if I became a Christian."

She looked at me, still silent, but listening with indescribable intentness. It had the effect of making me scrupulously accurate—she seemed to be setting so much value on what I was saying.

"I don't mean," I explained hastily, "that I should suffer persecution. My father would protect me—he is a good man, but he believes the things that they say of the Christians, and he wouldn't, he couldn't *understand*."

My voice trailed off. I looked down at my thumbs. It sounded such a feeble little reason. I had an idea that she would be once again smiling that shrewd smile at my poor mean confession of paltriness.

I heard her give a quick, sharp sigh. I looked up. She was grave, and her face was full of the tenderest sympathy and concern.

"But that is hard," she murmured, almost to herself. "Harder than persecution." Then she added softly, "There are seven kinds of sorrow, and seventy-seven kinds of suffering." I think that was how she put it, but I cannot quite remember. I know that, once again, what she said had that same authority—as though she knew. I looked into her face, and then I understood the extraordinary, uncommon beauty, something that a foolish portrait-maker would have touched out, but which

an artist would have given his days to be able to reproduce.

Then she began to ask me about myself and my home, listening quietly, with very little comment, while I found myself pouring out my story, the story, not of my intellectual difficulties, but of my ideals and aspirations—of the strong desire to believe that existed in part of me, at least (something in her way of listening made me punctiliously careful to speak the truth—to represent myself as I was). I told her everything—all about my little petty troubles, and how petty they were! And the pettier, the more she seemed to sympathise, as though she had actually experienced them all. Yet she said little. I can scarcely, as a matter of fact, recall a single sentence of what she did say. I only know that she drew the story out of me, bit by bit. I could not have conceived it possible beforehand that I could have unburdened myself thus. I seemed to get to know myself as I talked. She sat looking, sometimes at me, sometimes at the fire. Her eyes, at times smiling, at times full of gentle, tearful sympathy, seemed to draw out all that my heart contained. I had forgotten all about the metaphysics and philosophy. This Lady had intervened!

It is strange that I can recall so little of what she said, for when it came, it was always positive, yet not like the opinions of Demetrius which courted

contradiction by their very assurance. The memory is, in a way, blurred, like a dream. I can best revive it in a fashion which may make you smile. I was wearing a string of barbaric beads round my neck, and as I talked I had a nervous habit of slipping them through my fingers. It was a trick that might have fidgeted some people. Once I thought I had fidgeted her, for she paused suddenly, as though arrested by my action. Then she flashed out a curious smile—I have often wondered what it meant. After all these years I have only to take these beads (I have always kept them) and pass them through my fingers, and at once I seem to feel her listening, and to see again that wonderful look of rapt attention on her face. This seems a foolish detail, indeed, to set down to be copied on parchment, but you ask for the story as I tell it. Perhaps the unborn generations may guess the secret of why she smiled at my little trick with my string of beads!

Mine was an unconscionably long story. I told her how the Christian ideal had filled a great void in my heart—of the strange feeling of absolute restfulness that came over me when I felt the atmosphere of the Christian communities to which Demetrius introduced me—of my groping after the light which I felt was shining there, although I could not see it. "That, though," I added hastily, "is a contradiction, for darkness is dispelled by light."

I can remember what she answered then. "No," she rejoined, quickly. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness comprehends it not."

"If only I could see the Christ," I cried, as I had so often cried to myself. "You knew Him, perhaps?" I suddenly hazarded.

"Yes, I knew Him," she said. "I know Him."

I noted how she substituted the present tense. I gazed up at her in awe, but I was arrested by the tired, worn expression on her face. I had fagged her out with the endless tale of my troubles. It had become twilight. It must be getting late. I gazed at her in the flickering firelight, and as I gazed I felt my heart thrill within me. "Tell me what He was like," I whispered.

She made no reply. She simply sat smiling at me. I had amused her again somehow. And then, suddenly I knew—I *knew* what He was like. I almost got the idea that He was there before me. Was I scanning a vision that memory had called up in her mind?

"You knew Him well?" I breathed the question very diffidently.

"I am His Mother," she replied.

So she sat there, smiling at me, and holding my very soul with her smile.

I was without speech. I knew now that I believed—and I knew what He was like. His

Mother! That was the secret of this adorable Lady, this exquisite listener.

I found myself on my knees at her side.

"You will be brave," she said, answering my unspoken confession of faith.

Then I was daring and smiled back at her.

"I don't need to be brave," I cried; "it's quite easy now. I'm not afraid. I know now. I believe and I love"—I took her hand shyly and kissed it—"I love—Him!"

She kept hold of my hand, and of my eyes with her eyes. She only said one thing, very gently: "Can't you feel Him very near?" . . . .

I knew that the time had come for me to go. The thing was accomplished. I rose and she rose. She did not detain me. She took me to the door and let me out. I would have knelt and kissed the hem of her garment, but she had turned and glided back quietly into the shadowed room. The servant was awaiting me to conduct me back to the respectable part of the city. I had not been instructed in the Mystery of the Eternal *Logos* after all. I had received no sublime disquisition on the Word made Flesh in the House of John, but I had found the Christ, and I had found Him as the shepherds had found Him—with His mother.

This will be a strange screed, indeed, Marcella, to inscribe on imperishable parchment, but here it is!

And if so be, take my string of beads, likewise, and keep them with it, for who knows but that some other desolate soul, holding them in her hand as she tells her story, may not thus obtain a vision of the Listener?

THE ONE THAT FOLLOWED

I AM going to tell the world the story of my two big pictures—of the first, the "Transfiguration," which made my name—for a time—and the story of the one that followed.

I shall tell it quite simply. I have no time for fine writing, nor for any of the fine arts, for the matter of that. I must tell you that I possess a rather curious faculty (I believe others have it too) for seeing pictures with my mind's eye when I am listening to music. The music seems to translate itself into visualised forms, landscapes, or figures, as the case may be. Its message is conveyed to me that way; I see it, as it were, with my mental eye. That was the way in which my first big picture, the "Transfiguration," came to be painted.

I was staying in an Italian town where everyone had gone mad over the singing of a certain Signorina X. The Signorina's singing was something quite out of the common—more than a glorious organ and faultless voice production. "Something more than Art and diviner than genius," one enthusiast

said to me, and I became wildly curious to hear the Signorina X.

I was a young man, full of ideals and ambitions. My burning desire was to paint a big religious picture—a "Light of the World," or something of the kind—which would make me a shining light among my fellows.

I discovered that the Signorina was giving a farewell concert. She was leaving Italy, and, some people said, the concert platform as well, but admission to the concert was by invitation only. No tickets were to be sold.

So strictly was the spirit of the edict adhered to that when I went to the length of presenting myself at the concert hall and endeavoured to bribe the door-keeper, no sum of money that I offered could tempt him to pass me through. When at length I did succeed in persuading him to let me slip in and stand at the back, it was out of sheer pity that he did it.

The audience in the hall was one of the most curious that I have ever seen. Both rich and poor were represented—some were of the poorest, but there were wealthy folk too. There were several wheeled chairs containing invalids, and I noticed a number of blind people. I felt more of an intruder than I had expected to do.

The Signorina X came forward to sing as I slipped quietly into my "shy" corner—a dazzling person-

ality, slender and graceful, with a delicately beautiful face. She was gorgeously dressed in shimmering white.

The voice was like a bird's, full, vibrant, thrilling, yet with a quality of tenderness—I can't think of the other word. Surely the singer had Irish blood in her veins ?

The next moment I had forgotten the singer. I had forgotten the music—it was a Russian hymn of praise, I believe, a strange, grave yet rapturous, melody—I was ascending Mount Thabor ! I saw clearly, in detail, with my mental eye the picture which I afterwards reproduced for the world. Slowly, deliberately, it formed itself. The background, the atmosphere, the prostrate forms, and the three radiant figures. Everything else was obliterated by the vision. I rushed from the hall during the ensuing applause, carrying with me my glimpse of glory. I had got it down on canvas before the vision faded from my memory.

That was how "Transfiguration" came to be painted. Its success was amazing. It was exhibited in a gallery by itself, and all the world came to look at it. I had made my name as a religious painter. But the question was how to follow up my success unless the inspiration were repeated. My next picture was a relapse into the mediocre. "Transfiguration" promised to be an isolated triumph. The world would soon forget its painter.

I cherished a conviction that if only I could hear the Signorina X sing again a similar inspiration might come to me. There had been something behind the enthralling melody and the exquisite voice which had made the Signorina's singing magical—something "higher than Art and diviner than genius." If only I might hear her sing again!

I revisited the town where I had heard her, hoping to trace her whereabouts, but Signorina X had retired from the public ken. Nobody knew her real name even. Some said that she belonged to a princely Italian family, some that she was not Italian at all.

Then after many months, the "accident" occurred which is even more frequent in real life than in fiction. My "Transfiguration" picture was being exhibited in Paris, and I happened to visit the salon where it was being shown. Whilst I was there a lady entered and stood in contemplation before my picture.

It was Signorina X.

No doubt the association with the picture helped me to recognise her—I had carried away no distinct recollection of her; and yet, as I looked at the delicate, refined face, with its peculiarly "intent" expression, I marvelled that I should have forgotten it even in my dreams!

She was dressed very quietly in black. My "Transfiguration" evidently impressed her. I could

not lose the opportunity. Taking my courage in both hands I approached her, and introducing myself as the painter, I told her the story of the picture.

She was desperately interested. I have never known such a listener. I told her more than I had meant to about myself. She had a wonderful way with her. Surely the obsession of the Vision alone had prevented me from dreaming of the Signorina X!

"But," she asked, "I don't understand how you came to be at that farewell concert. They were all my special friends there—all the poor, or sad, or unhappy folk that I knew."

I smiled at her.

"I expect," I said, "that the door-keeper thought that I looked pitiable enough to merit admission, when I found I was to be excluded from hearing you sing."

She laughed—merrily.

"That was the last time that I sang to a big assembly," she said. "I never sing now for show."

I must have looked aghast, for she went on:

"I still sing, but only to poor people, or sick folk in their homes."

"But, Signorina," I cried, "there must be somewhere where I can hear you sing again? I want another inspiration."

"I sometimes sing to the poor mad folk in the asylums," she went on. Was she laughing at me?

"I want to hear you sing," I repeated petulantly. "I must give the world another great sacred picture."

She looked at me. She was quite grave now.

"Why must you give the world another great sacred picture?"

I don't know whether her eyes were truth-compelling, or whether her voice, even in speaking, possessed magic, but I answered with extraordinary frankness, according to the man I had not known myself to be:

"I want to keep up my reputation," I said. "I thought I had become famous, but now people are forgetting this picture, and I'm—I'm nobody."

She shook her head.

"No," she said, "I won't sing to you. That's not good enough. If you had been poor—wanting food—it would have been different, but not that. Go and paint ordinary pictures."

It was said sternly. She had drawn her delicate mouth into a firm, straight line. Her eyes were looking at me "with the lid off!" Yet they were the gentlest eyes that I have ever looked into; and they were not unfriendly.

The salon was empty. I stooped and kissed her hand. There was nothing else for it. "When you include really despicable folk among your clients," I said, "you will sing to me."

And then I went home and painted ordinary pictures.

I painted M.P.'s wives, and successful tradesmen in hunting pink, and landscapes for the dealers. I did it for perhaps a couple of years; and then there came a night when I was feeling more depressed than usual.

It was a hot June night, and I had been sitting up late reading. To add to my depression, caused by the contemplation of a blank canvas waiting to receive the features of a society dame discreetly tinkered by my subservient brush, there was a woman dying in the flat opposite my studio.

An Italian woman with a sinister reputation as an "escaped" nun, who had more than made up for lost time.

The landlady would gladly have seized on the excuse for sending her to the infirmary, but there had appeared an the scene a lady, a compatriot of the sick woman's, who begged to be allowed to look after her in her last hours, now rapidly approaching. I had heard the soft footfall of the good Samaritan as she passed to and fro, and once I had caught sight of a slender figure dressed in black. That was all.

I sat and surveyed my canvas; and a burning desire to paint another great picture seized hold of me—simply for the joy of painting it, of doing

good work. And as I sat gazing, there broke upon my ear the sound of someone singing.

It came from the room opposite. It was a Latin psalm, chanted in a simple plain-song melody, perhaps three notes, but it recalled a memory. The notes were rich and vibrant, low, and singularly pure. In a moment I had recognised the figure I had seen in the corridor. The face of the Signorina X rose before me. Yet, no—it was a man's face, and it came as in a vision, a music-picture.

All through the remaining dark hours I worked on the canvas, outlining the picture before me. The chanting continued almost without cessation, the voice growing thin and tired. When daylight came I painted in a frenzy, and the tired voice kept on. Now it was *Miserere;* now *Dominus regit me*, " the Lord is my Shepherd "; and now *Magnificat.*

Nothing distracted me. Hasty footsteps passed the door. A man's. They must have been for the doctor; but I worked on.

I stepped back from the canvas, dizzy. I had finished my task. I must eat. In an ordinary way I would have taken a brandy and soda, but I felt I must possess my soul. My strength must be me, my own.

I went out to a coffee-shop and fed. Half-an-hour later, when I returned to my studio, I retained no recollection of the vision that I had transferred to my canvas. It had completely gone. I dashed

back, fully expecting to find either a blank canvas, or a mass of smudges, the work of a demented man.

On the stairs I met a foreign priest—an Italian. I stopped to inquire after the occupant of the room opposite mine.

"She has made her peace with God," he answered. "The lady, when everything else failed, chanted the nuns' office to her, and it broke the ice. It was a wonderful thought of hers, but the Signorina is a wonderful woman."

I had left my studio door open. Standing in it I saw a lady. She was absorbed in contemplation of the canvas on my easel. It contained a picture. The study of a head. A tear-stained face, and the brow crowned with thorns.

I knew as I met the compelling eyes of the pictured face that I had achieved my masterpiece—the unwitting work of my hands. I knew, in a flash, that "Transfiguration" had been left far behind. That a world-fame would be mine. I was immortal!

The lady stood regarding the picture, her eyes big with worship.

"I've just finished it," I whispered. "I worked all night—whilst you were singing."

"What will you call it?" she asked. It was the first time she had spoken. Her voice was thin and husky. I noted how ill and worn she looked with watching. The eyes were bright and strained.

I picked up a piece of charcoal and scrawled the title across the canvas. It came to me, like the picture, from outside.

"Follow Me."

She stood a little longer looking at the picture, and then she turned to me. She had recognised me, and her eyes were full of friendship and bright with triumph.

"Well done!" she said.

* * * * * * *

That is the story of the picture that followed "Transfiguration." I can't tell you any more about it. I finished it in a few details, and gave it into the charge of a friend. I executed my commissioned portrait, settled up my affairs, and then—I followed.

I never knew what the Art critics said about "Follow Me." One doesn't hear much of that sort of thing in a Carthusian Monastery, but someone has said "Well done!" and that has spoiled me for the Art critics.

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